



Ripple Effect: How One Renovation Project Can Lead to Community Revitalization

By Gillian Lind

As in many North American cities, apartment neighbourhoods were built in Toronto as a solution to urban sprawl, providing density to support transit in the growing suburb, as well as affordable housing. Many of these communities today lack services and amenities, and the area of Kingston Galloway/Orton Park is no exception - until the inception of The East Scarborough Storefront in 2001. The Storefront is a partnership between community members and service agencies working together to address some of the most pressing needs in the community including employment assistance, legal advice, settlement services, youth groups, arts programs, mental health and counselling/parenting programs, and health services.

The Storefront is located in a former single-storey police station owned by the City of Toronto. In response to outgrowing the current building, the desire to update the facility, and to provide a more inspiring environment that better matches the centre's work, The Storefront's director, Anne Gloger, embarked on a project in 2009 called

The Community.Design.Initiative. This project engages community youth in imagining, designing, and working on the renovations and additions to their Community Resource Centre, with mentors from Sustainable.TO, students from the University of Waterloo, and ARCHITECT. With feedback from other community members and elders the youth developed a master plan for the building and the site by 2010, with the following goals in mind: 1) accessibility for all, and 2) sustainability now and into the future.

Turning It Into a Reality

With expertise from architect Paul Dowsett, his team at Sustainable.TO, and with recommendations from TH Energy, the 7,800-sq.ft. retrofit and two-storey, 8,000-sq.ft. addition are targeting a near net-zero building status and LEED Platinum certification. The building will be designed to take advantage of passive techniques, where possible, to reduce the heating and cooling demands of the building. Features include adding an exoskeleton to the existing building to increase thermal resistance, improving air tightness, and using the existing masonry structure as thermal mass; adding window shading



and cool, green roofing to reduce heat gain in summer and to take advantage of it in winter; adding light shelves and skylights to increase natural lighting; and including a natural green screen on south facade to provide natural shading and cooling during summer months. The existing building's lighting system will be upgraded with 25 Watt T8 lamps, and the whole building will receive task lighting, occupancy sensors, and system controls, as well as ENERGY STAR qualified windows, appliances, and office equipment to reduce electrical demands. The existing 1960s-era heating, cooling, and ventilating system will be replaced with energy-efficient equipment, serving multiple zones and programmable thermostats. Solar technologies will be installed, including a photovoltaic panel to generate all, or more, of the facility's electricity requirements, and solar thermal panels to supply approximately 80 per cent of the hot-water needs of the facility. Implementing all of these capital and energy-efficiency measures will prevent approximately 16 tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year - the equivalent of removing about 31 cars from our roads.

The building will include a rainwater collection system for site irrigation and toilet flushing, and all faucets and fixtures will be ultra-low flow, to further reduce water demand. Where possible reclaimed, recycled and low-VOC materials will be used, including low- or no-VOC paints, natural-ingredient Marmoleum flooring, and recycled content/recyclable InterFace carpet tiles.

The entire project will be implemented in eight phases over the next few years, and since the building is owned by the city, Wayne Robinson, a city Community Development Officer, oversaw the initial site-plan approval phase. His support role engaged appropriate city and community resources, in order to develop and maintain local partnerships that provided new ways for the city to conduct its business. Phase 2 of the renovation of the resource centre was completed in May

2011 by many community youth. Funding came from the province via Employment Ontario, providing momentum and inspiration as the project moves into Phase 3, the Eco Food Hub renovation, funded by the Metcalf Foundation. The Eco Food Hub combines a commercial-grade community kitchen, along with a community garden, to create and serve as a local example of closed-loop agriculture, creating waste-free food and resources for the neighbourhood.

Extending into the Community

The Community.Design.Initiative master plan caught the attention of Graeme Stewart, an Associate with ERA Architects who are tireless champions of Tower Neighbourhood Renewal. "The Storefront provides a unique model for service delivery and community leadership with great potential for repeatability in Apartment Neighbourhoods throughout the region. Every neighbourhood should have a Storefront, says Graeme." The goal of the City's Tower Neighbourhood Renewal is to enable tower communities to achieve their full potential as prosperous, vibrant and sustainable places. The project's master plan is in alignment with the City's Tower Neighbourhood Renewal initiative and as such The Storefront and the adjacent apartment towers have been marked as a case study by the city. ERA Architects and the City are developing a plan that will revitalize the entire surrounding neighbourhood with more efficient vehicular access, and increased pedestrian walkways, accessibility between sites and landscaped public spaces. Paul Dowsett describes the project best. "It is where we all come together -- Community, Professionals & the City - working to deliver what the Community wants, that the sustainable magic occurs."

For more information on The Community.Design.Initiative, visit www.communitydesigninitiative.org.