

Lansdowne affordable housing

MIXED-USE POSSIBILITIES

By Andrew Cohrs

With housing prices at an all-time high, rental vacancy rates at an all-time low and affordable housing increasingly scarce, the City of Toronto plans to develop a vacant city-owned property near the Junction Triangle to help ease the pressure, albeit in a small way.

Previously a TTC storage and maintenance garage for streetcars and diesel buses, the 1.6-ha site at 640 Lansdowne was declared surplus in 1997. Subsequently, it was identified as an affordable housing site through the city's Open Door Program. Under the program a Request for Proposals is issued to private and not-for-profit sector developers. The RFP, expected in the fall of 2017, could include neighbourhood-specific criteria for the project, which will target households with an average annual income of between \$39,000 and \$49,000.

"We are losing a lot of people that have lived in the community for a long time. Young people that are graduating are not able to rent in this community. The people that work in some of our establishments, some in our creative sector, they are having a really hard time being able to live in this community. A lot of our seniors, they are having a hard time," Ward 16 Davenport councillor and city housing advocate **Ana Bailão** told the crowd at Wednesday's open house.

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Hotel growth stalled

PRESSURE POINT

By Leah Wong

Despite a rise in tourism over the last five years, growth in Toronto's hotel industry has stalled. The industry is facing pressures from an influx of home-share offerings, new GTA hotels and rising operational costs. With council considering a hotel tax as a way to generate much needed revenue for the city, industry representatives are concerned that this would be another disincentive for hotel developers and event organizers to bring business to the city.

On Monday economic development committee received an update on the performance of the hotel industry in Toronto. **Greater Toronto Hotel Association** president **Terry Mundell** said Toronto has experienced a loss of hotels since 2010 and the cost of doing business here is discouraging new investment.

"We have roughly the same number of rooms as in 2000. If you take a look at other jurisdictions, which we compete against, they've grown their businesses by thousands of rooms. We've not been able to do that," Mundell told committee. "It's all about profitability... We can't get to that number [where it is attractive] ... for investors to invest."

According to statistics from **CBRE Hotels** there was 25,573 hotel rooms in Toronto in 2000.

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Open house participants raised concerns about crime in the neighbourhood, connectivity issues in the immediate areas, a deficiency in greenspace and the need for affordable living and working space. As well, they spoke about the appropriate income levels the project should target and whether the city would consider converting the employment lands to accommodate further residential development.

The site is contaminated with trichloroethylene from an offsite business, and while a legal settlement has been reached between the city and the polluter, it will require remediation that may take up-to-five years to complete.

The official plan designates one-third of the site as mixed-use and the remainder as employment lands. The site is adjacent to a gelatin factory and protecting employment land continues to be a city priority. Speaking at the open house, affordable housing office director **Sean Gadon** said that the city's intention is to preserve the existing zoning and accelerate redevelopment.

"The conversation I had with our planners was that they plan to preserve the existing zoning that provides the commercial employment lands... If we enter into a rezoning and official plan amendment process we will be sitting here in five years talking about this issue. So one of the things that the mayor and councillors charged me with was to make something happen that would be appropriate but ... would respect the existing zoning on the site... [We are going to] try to see if we can proceed on a site that has essentially been left abandoned for 22 years, and activate it with some affordable housing on the front end of it and the employment use at the back," Gadon told participants.

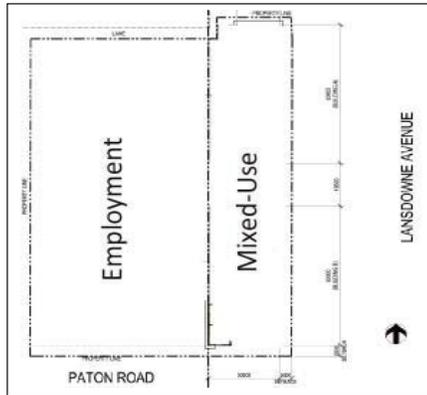
Planning midtown section manager **Jamie McEwan** confirmed that the city would not support an employment land conversion to accommodate further residential development. He told *NRU* that staff would not support the introduction of a sensitive use like housing too close to the gelatin factory.

Bailão told participants that the employment land



Looking west towards the vacant site at 640 Lansdowne Avenue

SOURCE: ANABAILAO.COM



City of Toronto official plan designations for city-owned site at 640 Lansdowne Avenue

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

designation provides an interesting opportunity to retain working families in the neighbourhood, offer reasonable rents to creative businesses and add some community amenities.

"This site has something particular and special because it is not 100 per cent only residential... Only the part facing Lansdowne can actually be residential. [The remainder of the site] is what's called employment so it could be auxiliary spaces for mixed use, it could be working space, it could be some community space."

Bailão said that the intention is to use the residential use to activate the employment lands but this does not rule out the possibility of introducing greenspace as well. Referring

to the Wychwood Barns development in Ward 21 St. Paul's as an example where affordable housing and work spaces and outdoor amenities were all successfully incorporated on a former TTC site. She noted that reasonable rent for creative businesses is also an issue in this neighbourhood.

"This site is not going to solve the affordable housing problem in the city... It is targeting one group [and] other projects around the city are targeting other ones... It is trying to address something that we hear over and over and over again in our community, that people are being pushed out."

Gadon said that the residential component of the project would comprise no more than 120 units in a mid-rise building of up-to-6-storeys tall and could be as small as 40 townhouse units.

The affordable housing office will now retain urban design consultants to prepare potential designs for the residential component and determine appropriate uses for the employment lands. Further public consultation is anticipated in early 2017 once alternative design options have been created. **NRU**