



A new face for West Don Lands

by pat brennan

They're not world-class athletes, but Dave Wex and Mark Reeves expect to win big with the Pan Am Games.

Wex, 45 and Reeves, 52, are the developers of River City, the first condominium project proposed for West Don Lands, the innovative new community planned for the west bank of the Don River near the end of its flow into Toronto Harbour.

Their River City project was unveiled well before Toronto was selected on November 6 to host the 2015 Pan Am Games. The athletes' village for the games will be a near neighbour of River City in the West Don Lands just south of where King Street flies over the Don River.

"This neighbourhood, playing such a big role in the Pan Am Games, has triggered a lot of additional excitement about this condo project," says Ben Rusonik,

who heads the sales team for Milborne Real Estate at River City.

"Many of the people we talk with realize that getting the Pan Am Games means the new infrastructure for this neighbourhood will need to be fast-tracked so everything will be ready by the summer of 2015. That means their new neighbourhood will grow into fruition much faster than it would without this stimulus."

"Neighbourhood" was rarely the word used to describe this most eastern edge of Toronto's downtown core. For the past decade it has been mostly abandoned industrial lands often used to dump construction debris. In Toronto's industrial days it was home to a variety of low, red-brick buildings for grimy industrial manufacturing.

Movie directors liked this "neighbourhood" for shooting scenes of seedy, dark streets where drug

deals went down, dead gangsters got rolled out of speeding cars or spies lurked in the shadows carrying envelopes of cash to exchange for Pentagon secrets.

But the future envisioned for West Don Lands is much like a Disney movie scene with acres of flowers, trees and green grass. There will be shiny bright buildings lining streetscapes of sidewalk cafés, couples pushing baby strollers, trendy retail shops interspersed with ground-floor professional offices, retirees guiding their visiting grand kids into ice cream shops, lovers sitting on benches to watch submarine races in the Don River, or maybe just some Canada geese.

Commuters will be riding bicycles along designated paths separated from the streetcar tracks that will be laced through the neighbourhood.



Mother Nature may hardly notice River City's carbon footprint, say its planners. West Don Lands is to be a world leader as a community with less than zero greenhouse gas emissions. The way the homes function, plus choices to be made by the residents will offset the carbon emissions created by building the project with concrete, steel and glass.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton and his Climate Positive Development Program has selected 16 large development projects around the world as ideal demonstrations of sustainable urban growth. West Don Lands – in particular the Lower Don Lands – is one of those sites.

Waterfront Toronto, the principal land owner of West Don Lands, is a compilation of municipal, provincial and federal money.

Waterfront Toronto was formed to revitalize more than 2,000 acres of publicly owned waterfront and riverfront lands on the east side of Toronto's core. Its mission statement is "To put Toronto at the forefront of global cities in the 21st century by transforming the waterfront into beautiful, sustainable new communities, parks and public spaces, fostering economic growth in knowledge-based, creative industries and ultimately re-defining how the city, province and country are perceived by the world."

West Don Lands is one of four distinct communities within that massive plan. Its 80 acres are bounded by the Don River on the east, Parliament Street on the west, King Street on the north and the railway corridor on the south. Lower Don Lands includes 308

acres and runs south from the railway corridor to the shipping channel, which runs east off Toronto Harbour.

River City is designed by Saucier & Perrotte, a Montreal architecture firm that was recently named Canada's best by the Royal Architecture Institute. Gilles Saucier chose to curve the shape of the initial building in the project to match its neighbour – the curving ramp connecting the Don Valley Parkway to the Gardiner Expressway.

Rusonik says Wex and Reeves, the principals at Urban Capital Property Group, chose to bring both Phase 1 and 2 to market simultaneously because of the flow of public inquiries. Sales at River City won't begin until February, but buyers can register today by visiting www.rivercitytoronto.com.

Prices currently range from



\$179,900 to \$769,900. There will be loft apartments ranging in size from 349 sq. ft. of living area and two-bedrooms with 789 sq. ft., to penthouse suites with 1,600 sq. ft. Townhouse units range in size from 1,000 to 1,600 sq. ft.

The 14-storey building included in Phase 1 will have enclosed bridges connecting to three different floors in an adjoining five-storey building.

In all, there will be five residential buildings at River City, some with up to 24 floors.

Waterfront Toronto required River City to be a LEED Gold building. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and has various levels depending on how much energy the building can avoid using.

Michael Pires of Kitchener-based Enermodal Engineering heads up the infrastructure team at River City and says this project is aiming to use 40 per cent less energy than a standard condominium of similar size. That means a 40-per-cent cut in electricity bills for its occupants.

A wide variety of innovative products and features is going into River City to achieve that 40-per-cent saving. One of the biggest contributors will be a District

Energy System (DES).

River City and all buildings built in the four communities creating the new waterfront will be heated and cooled by several DES plants. A new DES plant is being built on the east side of Cherry Street to service buildings in West Don Lands.

Underground pipes, mostly beneath roadways, will carry hot and cold water to all buildings for heating and cooling. Natural gas will be used initially to heat the water, but the district plants can be converted to more efficient, cleaner or cheaper fuels as they are developed, without any disruption to the nine million sq. ft. of residential and commercial buildings proposed for the entire waterfront redevelopment.

In River City, clothes dryers in the suites will not have exhaust vents. Water will be drawn from hot moist air coming out of a dryer and sent down the drain. The air will then pass through an HRV (heat recovery ventilator) in each suite.

Even the underground garage will be pre-wired to accommodate future electric cars.

"These suites will be metered to the teeth," says Pires, who earned an engineering degree at University of Toronto and a

master's degree in sustainable engineering in Stockholm, Sweden, where some of the world's most advanced sustainable practices are being applied.

Pires says not only will the suites be more energy efficient than any currently in Toronto, they'll be healthier too. Each suite's HRV will be sending fresh air into every room rather than just into the building's corridors where it would seep under the apartment doors.

As well as 28 acres of surface parkland in the 80-acre West Don Lands site, there will be greens growing on any flat roofs of the buildings. Even the neighbourhood energy plant will have a green roof.

More details are available online at www.rivercitytoronto.com.



Pat Brennan covered the Ontario real estate scene as editor for 15 of his 32 years with the Toronto Star. Now retired, Pat has acquired a Class C driver's licence and roams North America in his 22-ft. RV. Pat documents his stories from the road online at www.travelswithlefty.com