

WEST DON LANDS

'This is where it starts'



Artist's rendering shows how River City will look when the area, along the Don River, south of King St., is transformed into a collection of loft-style condos, penthouses and townhomes.

'This project sets the precedent for everything that they're doing with the waterfront'

RYAN STARR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's a blustery fall afternoon in downtown Toronto and David Wex, a partner with Urban Capital Property Group, is standing on the Adelaide St. ramp, looking out over the West Don Lands.

At the moment the vacant swath of land, just under a hectare, located along the Don River south of King Street, is little more than post-industrial wasteland.

Soon, though, Wex's firm will begin transforming it into River City, the first residential development in Toronto's much vaunted water-

front revitalization.

Construction on River City — which will ultimately include more than 900 loft-style condos, penthouses and townhomes — is slated to begin next year, with occupancy of the initial phase targeted for 2012.

This will be Toronto's first green community, a truly sustainable neighbourhood with LEED Gold engineered, carbon-neutral buildings, a district energy system and green roofs.

"This project is a gateway to Toronto from the east," Wex says. "It's hugely significant. It sets the prece-

dent for everything that they're doing with the waterfront. Our tagline is, 'This is where it starts.'"

River City will be built in three phases, with townhomes and towers ranging from six to 24 storeys. These striking structures will have sleek translucent facades accented by dark metallic panelling and sloped exterior walls.

An artist's rendering of the development makes it look like a city of the future. But in a nod to the adjacent Distillery District and Corktown, River City will also embrace

RIVER CITY continued on H20



HOMES & CONDOS

Site captures 'the beauty of nature, industry'

RIVER CITY from H1

the area's industrial heritage (including the Adelaide-Richmond Streets that dissect the neighbourhood).

"The site has hard stuff about it and soft," says Wex. "It's the beauty of nature and industry — the architecture really plays up on that."

For this he's quick to praise Montreal-based Saucier + Perrotte Architects, designers of the development.

"Their architecture is totally unique. It's not like anything we've ever seen. Their forms are big moving pieces; they're almost tectonic." River City is the first residential development in the extensive waterfront revitalization. All told, the decade-long master plan calls for 1,000 residential units, 1,200 of which are to be affordable rental housing. There will also be one million square feet of employment space, an elementary school and two child-care centres.

Green space won't be hard to come by. River City sits adjacent to Don River Park, nearly eight hectares of parkland built atop a flood protection embankment.

Saucier + Perrotte also designed the interior spaces at River City, so there will be common threads run-

FACTS AND FIGURES

River City will be built in three phases. Buildings 1 and 2 together comprise Phase 1, building 3 is Phase 2, buildings 4 and 5 are the final phase.

• **Building 1:** Six-storey townhomes with 100 units (includes a two-storey lounge and party room located in a cantilevered "light box" with a kitchen, bar and media area). The light box is a two-storey structure made mainly of glass which, when illuminated, stands out against the darker backdrop of the surrounding buildings' metal cladding. The box juts out from the building on a cantilever(s) — a long projecting beam or girder that's fixed at only one end.

• **Building 2:** 15-storey highrise with 230 units (connected to Building 1 by a three-storey glass bridge and will include a food market).

• **Building 3:** 11-storey structure

ning through the motif.

"There's seamlessness between what the outside looks like and the inside," Wex explains.

Interior designs will offer a contrasting play of darks and lights. To add a bit of industrial flavour to the

comprised of four glass mini-towers with 200 units (connected to Building 1 by a shared courtyard with an illuminated outdoor heated pool on a floating deck and an outdoor dining area).

• **Buildings 4 and 5:** 24-storey and 10-storey buildings with 400 units total and shops, restaurants and cafes at grade.

SIZE RANGE

• **Townhomes:** 1,000 to 1,600 square feet

• **Lofts:** 400 to 900 square feet

• **Penthouses:** 515 to 1,600 square feet (two-storey units).

PRICE RANGE

• **Condos:** \$180,000 to \$400,000

• **Townhomes and penthouses (some two-storeys):** \$400,000 and \$600,000

Go to www.rivercitytoronto.com for more information.

— Ryan Starr

units, hardware and pillars will be left exposed.

Most of the condos will have movable partition wall panels to either close an area off or open it up. Lofts will have nine-foot ceilings and hardwood flooring in all the living

areas and bedrooms. The majority of units will also have private balconies and terraces.

Kitchens will be outfitted with the usual array of stainless steel appliances along with stone countertops and glass backsplashes.

Bathrooms will have vessel sinks, stone countertops and ceramic tile flooring.

The first phase of River City is slated to go on sale in the new year.

Prices range from \$180,000 to \$400,000 for a condo and between \$400,000 and \$600,000 for townhomes and penthouses, some of which will be two-storey.

"I'd describe (River City) as the Audi A4," Wex says. "It's accessible to people, it's well thought-out and well-crafted, but it's not a Mercedes-Benz C-class."

If pre-registration numbers can offer any indication — 1,500 people had signed up as of Oct. 16 — early interest in the development has been keen.

"People have been waiting for this," Wex says. "It's the start of something very big and they want to get in on the ground floor."

A LEADER IN GREEN BUILDING

River City will be in the vanguard of green building in Toronto.

Indeed, the entire waterfront de-

velopment has been designed to meet a LEED Gold standard as part of a pilot program with the U.S. Green Building Council. (LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — is a rating system that provides a set of standards for environmentally sustainable construction.)

The West Don Lands precinct will be serviced by a district energy system. Buildings will be heated and cooled from a central energy plant, with water supplied through a system of underground piping.

This eliminates the need for boilers, furnaces, hot water heaters, chillers and air-conditioning units.

It also means no unsightly smokestacks and cooling towers on the roofs. Instead, each building in River City over three storeys will have a green roof, including the parking garages. Green roofs, or living roofs, absorb rainwater, insulate and help mitigate the urban heat island effect.

All in-home appliances — refrigerators and dishwashers, washers/dryers, exhaust fans — will be Energy Star-rated. River City will also have a hybrid car and bike-share program as well as parking garages pre-wired for electric-car charging stations.

"Sustainability is a core value for our organization," says John Campbell, chief executive of Waterfront Toronto, the agency overseeing the entire redevelopment project.

"Our role is not to build the odd green building, it is to be an agent of market transformation.

"We control land for 40,000 residential units downtown," he adds, referring to the total number of homes at build-out. "That's 115,000 people. We should be using that clout to drive the marketplace."

THREE-LEVEL PARTNERSHIP

Waterfront Toronto was established in 2003 as a partnership of the municipal, provincial and federal governments.

The waterfront redevelopment project is being launched with \$1.5 billion in government seed capital. In what Campbell calls a "rolling forward model" of financing, Waterfront Toronto invests the money in infrastructure on Crown land, sells the land, oversees its development, then reinvests the profits in more infrastructure and makes additional land sales and the process repeats.

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JOHN CAMPBELL,
WATERFRONT TORONTO

The West Don Lands were once part of a thriving industrial area, so soil remediation of the brownfield site has been a necessity.

Flood protection was also a serious concern. To deal with the problem, Waterfront Toronto has built a large embankment, or berm, along the Don River, requiring 400,000 cubic metres of fill and costing a whopping \$60 million to build. (This land has now become the new Don River Park).

"It's been the biggest challenge so far in the West Don Lands," Campbell says. "There have been huge complications in building this that have held us up."

Despite the logistical headaches, though, the site is now prepped for construction to begin on phase one of River City.

Campbell has high hopes for what he believes will be a prototype community marking a new era of urban living in Toronto.

"This will be a new kind of place to live," he says. "I think it will attract people who think about things differently; who think about sustainability and are more attuned to that."

"We've got to find a way to enable people to go through their entire life cycle downtown. People will stay here if we provide the quality of life for them."