

IMPROVING ACCESS



Rob Jowett

An affordable housing provider in Toronto is taking advantage of the city’s financial incentives to nearly triple the number of units they provide on a site, to provide five affordable units to artists and to make many of the site’s units accessible, especially for seniors.

Riverdale Co-operative Houses is a non-profit affordable housing provider in Toronto that owns 26 properties in the city, including a three-storey heritage building at 685 Queen Street East that contains nine affordable rental units. Riverdale is proposing to expand this facility by developing a five-storey building containing 17 affordable rental units behind the existing building. Sixty-two per cent of the new affordable units would be barrier-free, offering housing opportunities for tenants with mobility challenges and seniors who often have a harder time finding suitable rental accommodations in the city. Five of the units are being designated for artists’ use specifically. The project also involves the refurbishment of the existing apartments in the building. Riverdale has partnered with **Streetcar Developments** to deliver the

project. They are seeking site plan approval for the new building and a minor variance to allow for the refurbishment of the existing building.

“The dream was to accommodate the aging [community] members in homes that were suited for people who with mobility challenges,” Riverdale Co-operative Houses manager **Adene Kuchera** told *NRU*. “Riverdale Co-operative Houses is a scattered portfolio of affordable housing units. So, we’ve got, typically, walk-up apartment buildings, townhouses, duplexes, semis, triplexes, all these things. But what we don’t have is accessible accommodation.”

Kuchera says the project

will provide units that will better meet the needs of its residents and of people who need affordable housing generally. She says the existing apartments are in serious need of repair, and that they will be upgraded and made as accessible as possible. She notes that the upgrades will provide a new space to live for aging residents at other Riverdale properties that currently, do not fully meet their needs. Five of the units are being designated for use by artists specifically to support the city’s cultural sector.

“Affordable housing opportunities for artists is a vital part of supporting the City’s creative sector and its cultural economy,” City of

Toronto housing secretariat director **Valesa Faria** told *NRU*. “However, the high cost of rent and limited affordable housing options have made it challenging for many artists to continue to live in the city. It is proposed that five of the 26 new affordable rental homes at 685 Queen Street East be allocated to provide much-needed affordable housing for professional artists in the Riverdale community. These units will be designated and operated for residential use.”

Kuchera says that for the first time ever, the building will also include community amenity space where residents will be able to hold meetings regarding matters in and around the co-op and to use for anything else they might need. The new building will also feature a rooftop terrace and bicycle storage.

Most of the residents of the existing co-op building have already relocated, and Kuchera says around half have gone

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Location of Riverdale Co-operative Houses’ facility at 685 Queen Street East. The affordable housing provider is proposing to expand its existing facility from accommodating nine units to accommodating 26 accessible residential units.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

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to other properties owned by Riverdale. She says there are still a couple of apartments in the building that remain occupied and that Riverdale is looking to move those tenants out in the next three months. She adds that tenants who were displaced to accommodate the redevelopment will have a right of first refusal for moving back to the building once it is redeveloped.

The project is taking advantage of several affordable housing initiatives, such as the Open Door program, which provides financial relief such as capital funding and development fee reduction or elimination. \$640,000 was awarded to the project from that initiative and \$1,369,303 in city fees have been waived, including the next 100 years of property taxes and all development fees. \$3.9-million has been awarded from the provincial affordable housing program Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative. The project is also part of the Concept to Keys Development Review Pilot Program which prioritizes affordable housing development during the development review process.

“The city’s contributions have been significant... we couldn’t have done it without that. The equity that the co-op

has to put into this is just the land and the buildings,” says Kuchera. “If there would have been the funding to allow a larger building, that would have been welcome.”

The existing building on the site is listed on the city’s heritage register. It was constructed in 1903-1904 for the residence and medical practice of Dr. **John B. Fraser** and by 1919 had been converted for the **Washington Fleury Burial Company**. The building was converted into apartments by 1949. The house is designed mainly in the Edwardian residential

style but the city’s heritage report notes that it has many elements characteristic of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, such as the boxy massing. It was designed by architect **C. F. Wagner**.

Kirkor Architects and Planners is the lead architect for the project.



Rendering of the proposed development for 685 Queen Street East, which would be built behind the existing heritage building occupied by Riverdale Co-operative Houses. The rendering is an artistic expression and is subject to change.

SOURCE: STREETCAR DEVELOPMENTS
ARCHITECT: KIRKOR ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS

Photo of the existing building at 685 Queen Street that was constructed in 1903-1904. Designed by C. F. Wagner, the building is designed mainly in the Edwardian residential style but also has many elements characteristic of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO