Canadian Brownfields Case Study

Greystone Village Redevelopment

Source: HobinArchitecture

Context Maps for the planned Greystone Village redevelopment.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Located on the Western shores of the Rideau River in Old Ottawa East, Greystone Village by The Regional Group is a residential community development that integrates history with modern residential living. Situated on 26 acres with approximately 950 housing units, comprising of "a mix of single detached, townhomes, a number of mid to high-rise condominium towers, rental apartments, [and] a retirement residence", the development is set to be completed in five phases over the coming years[1].This case study is unique in that the land on which the development is taking place is both a brownfield, and features a protected heritage building. This poses unique challenges for the developer to ensure that both the history and significance of the land are respected, while ensuring a clean and safe environment for future residential and commercial development.

Perhaps the most important and notable feature of Greystone Village would be the history of the lands on which the development is taking place. With the Edifice Deschâtelets built in 1885, the monastery would become a symbol of the Catholic Religious order in Ottawa East for over 155 years[2]. Being home to Oblate Brothers for much of the past 100 years, the property was acquired in 2016 when much of the building was being used for the archives of the Oblates[3].

The Edifice Deschâtelets is protected under the Ontario Heritage Act, and the developer intends to partner with the City of Ottawa to incorporate the building into a community centre in the future[4]. It is clear that the developer intends to build on the rich history of the lands in this residential development. It is also the case that, since 1885, the lands have always had a primary residential use. Various changes to the original structure have occurred, with "additions/extensions…

QUICK FACTS

Location
Ottawa, Ontario

Project type
Residential and commercial

Site size
10.5 hectares (26 acres)

Land uses
Residential and commercial

Keywords/special features
Oblate lands, Old Ottawa east

Website
https://www.hobinarc.com/projects/greystone-village-the-oblate-lands-redevelopment/

Project address
175A Main Street. Ottawa, Ontario

Brownfield Project Award(s)
2018 Brownie Award: Renew - Development at a Community Scale

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Case studies were prepared as a course assignment by students enrolled in PLG845: Brownfield Reuse & Development, Cleaning up the Past and Building the Future, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Ryerson University (Winter 2019). Information for the case studies was obtained from online sources, available reports, and, in some cases, site visits and direct communication with stakeholders.

If you are aware of any errors or have updates to the case studies, please contact chris.desousa@ryerson.ca

added to the main Deschâtelets building throughout the 1920s, 1940s, 1948, 1950, and 1958. The total building area is 14,511 m2 (156,200 sq. ft.)"[5]. This building will serve not only as the historical centrepiece for the Ottawa East community, but also serve as a literal centrepiece for the development.

Cleanup

With the formal land use and occupation of the Oblate Brothers on the development lands since 1885, it may initially be somewhat of a surprise that soil remediation was required. However, as the Phase One and Phase Two Environmental Site Assessments show, there were multiple other activities and topographical changes that were noted as Potentially Contaminating Activity (PCA) – with 14 PCAs being recorded in or around the site area.

One such example of a PCA is the potential for soil quality to be affected by the facilities that were in place for the personal vehicles of convent's residents. From the 1940s onwards, a "small garage building attached to the northwest side of the Deschâtelets building" had a "100,000 litre (L) [gasoline] underground storage tank (UST)" to fuel the vehicles of residents, and this was not decommissioned until the 1980s[6]. While this meant potential contamination of the land, the Phase Two Environmental Assessment concludes that this specific PCA was not considered an Area of Potential Environmental Concern, "due to distance (50 m) and [the fact that] the PCA is down gradient from the Site"[7].

One issue that did require clean up, however, was the "presence of fill of unknown composition and quality"[8]. Located on the southern portion of the site, the topography changes to be "significantly higher in elevation than the north part due to filling activities which reportedly occurred sometime between 1902 and 1922 to prevent flooding"[9].

The issue regarding clean up arises in that there is uncertainty regarding which materials were used as part of the fill. According to the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, it is thought that "the fill was comprised of concrete, some asphalt, brick, ash, and potentially refuse. In addition, ash originating from the historical coal burning used as the fuel for convent heating before switching to natural gas in 1950 was reportedly deposited on the Site in the past"[10]. This is a particular issue, which means soil remediation is an integral part of the development project, and required a clean up strategy to ensure this was dealt with.

Source: HobinArchitecture

Image of the future Edifice Deschâtelets

The specific pollutants noted as being present in high quantities include the following: Petroleum hydrocarbons F1-F4 (PHC), BTEX (benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylen), Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH), and lastly a variety of metals[11]. When deciding on which remediation strategy to use toremove the listed chemicals, the developer chose an option, which is perhaps among the most expensive for cleaning up the soil. This entailed the removal of 47,890.7 cubic meters of contaminated soil, transporting the soil to a licenced waste disposal site, and the bringing of 4,000 cubic meters of uncontaminated soil to the site[12]. Some of this new uncontaminated soil came from the nearby excavations for the City of Ottawa's new LRT line[13].

Planning and Redevelopment

The planning processes for Greystone village were notably straightforward and without complications, when compared to other brownfield redevelopments throughout Ontario. However, there were multiple concerns raised by the community and regulatory processes followed to ensure that any such concerns were addressed.

Further planning and mapping for the property's redevelopment.

Source: HobinArchitecture

Perhaps above all, from the start of the development, there was strong community input. There were "several meetings in the summer of 2014 leading up to an informal all day charrette at the City and a public consultation on September 16th, 2014 hosted jointly by the Old Ottawa East Community Association"[14]. The majority of public concerns relate to public access for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. For example, the community expressed a desire for "continuous access to the riverside path for uninterrupted bike/walk from Strathcona, Springhurst, Brantwood and Windsor Parks as much as possible"[15]. The riverside walkway and the environmental integrity of the Rideau River are also of top concern to residents who expressed their thoughts "surrounding erosion and aesthetics of [the] shoreline"[16]. These concerns are specifically addressed in the Old Ottawa East Secondary Plan, which states that there is a need to "naturalize the river frontage along a 30 metre open space corridor as measured from the Normal High Water Mark of the Rideau River at the rear of the Oblate land, in consultation with the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority"[17].

Beyond this, the Ottawa East Secondary Plan provides a "framework for change that will see this area develop towards the vision that the community desires while meeting the planning objectives of the City's Official Plan"[18]. This involves specific reference to the Oblate lands where the Greystone development is taking place, ensuring a high standard of planning and community involvement. Despite collaboration and strong efforts by the community, developers and the secondary plan, not all of the residents' concerns could be fully addressed. For example, the City of Ottawa stated that the "retention of trees around the forecourt space has proven difficult given the space constraints of the townhouse blocks adjacent and the age and health of many of the existing trees"[19].Overall, however, most stakeholders involved have broadly viewed the project as positive, and it has been a largely collaborative process involving all such stakeholders.

Financing

Financing for the brownfield remediation for the Greystone redevelopment was historical in nature, as the largest brownfield redevelopment grant ever approved by the City of Ottawa as of 2016[20]. The Economic and Finance Committee recommended Council approve the application "for a grant under the 2010 Brownfields Redevelopment Community Improvement Plan Program not to exceed $15,811,365, subject to the establishment of, and in accordance with, the terms and conditions of the Brownfields Redevelopment Grant Agreement"[21].

It was also proposed that the development be "exempt… from paying future municipal development charges up to a maximum of $12,132,830… under the Guideline for the Development Charge Reduction due to Site Contamination Program, approved by Council June 11, 2014"[22].

This level of funding through the use of municipal grants is unusual, and does not come without criticism. While noting the benefits of brownfield redevelopment, Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson voiced a desire for such developments to feature a greater consideration of the need for affordable housing, arguing that "we want the companies to recognize there are over 10,000 people on a wait list for affordable housing and every project should have some component of affordable housing within it"[23]. This being said, the City of Ottawa's funding for brownfield remediation developments, through Brownfield Community Improvement Plans, is unique as these plans incentivise developers to redevelop otherwise highly litigious and expensive lands. In this specific case, city funding has allowed for an otherwise vacant property to become a new community hub.

Building

The new development will comprise of approximately 950 housing units, including "a mix of single detached, townhomes, a number of mid to high-rise condominium towers, rental apartments, [and] a retirement residence"[24]. This will see the existing Edifice Deschâtelets retained with a new focus as the architectural centrepiece of the community. Greystone was designed by architect Barry J. Hobin, who emphasised "natural textures and materials in the elevations including brick, limestone and wood… [which] integrates with the surrounding community"[25].

The development as a whole was successful and was recognized with a 2018 Brownie award on the basis of various criteria. The criteria for the award specifically references the "adaptive reuse of heritage and other structures to encourage integrated multi-phased redevelopment" as well as the ability of the project to "promote comprehensive neighbourhood transformation by re-envisioning the public realm, and improving functionality, liveability and character"[26].

Overall, the built and human scale of the Greystone development demonstrates a multitude of different housing typologies appropriately coming together to create a mixeduse urban environment that focuses equally on preserving heritage, while simultaneously providing a modern living environment suiting the needs of residents today.

Source: BuzzBuzzHomes

A rendering of the terraces at Greystone Village.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

There were multiple challenges in advancing the Greystone development, most notably the brownfield remediation itself. This development serves as the perfect case study to show how multiple stakeholders are able to come together to positively address various issues in remediating a brownfield site. The Greystone development took strides in addressing the heritage needs of the Edifice Deschâtelets, and ensuring that its history will be preserved in this new development, while ensuring a modern and liveable community can thrive.

With regards to brownfield remediation specifically, the grants provided by the City of Ottawa show the commitment from both the public and private sector to address and revitalize brownfield sites in local urban centres, allowing such lands to be utilized in the best public interest. While brownfield projects are highly litigious and difficult to complete, which can be off-putting for some developers, co-operation between municipalities and the private sector through strong brownfield community improvement plans can ensure these sites are developed to be liveable and safe for the community. All of this has been displayed through the Greystone project, which should arguably be viewed as a role model for future projects in the province of Ontario and Canada as a whole.

Endnotes

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4 Shaw, M. (2019, January 8). Ottawa Greystone Village different kind of infill development. In Real Estate News Exchange . Retrieved from https://renx.ca/downtown-homes-townhomes-in-ottawas-greystone-village/

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