

Canadian Brownfields Case Study

Crosstown Celestica Development



Source: urbantoronto.ca (2017)

Figure 1. Crosstown Celestica is a mixed-use, transit-supportive community that will contain nearly 10,000 residents and 3,300 employees on a former brownfield site.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Crosstown Celestica is a 60-acre property that is located at the northwest and southwest corner of Eglinton Avenue East and Don Mills Road in Toronto, Ontario. The brownfield site was formerly the headquarters of Celestica Inc., an electronics and manufacturing company, but is now being redeveloped into a mixed-use, transit-supportive community (see Figure 1). The project is set to be constructed in three phases over 15 to 20 years. Upon completion, the development will include office and commercial space, residential units, public parks and open space, and community amenities. This project has been commended for the amount of public infrastructure that has been incorporated into the design, advancing the City's transit-oriented development principles and retaining the historic legacy of the property.

Site Characteristics and History

Before this redevelopment, the site contained two low-rise facilities surrounded by several surface parking lots and a cloverleaf access ramp for vehicular traffic (see Figure 2). The first facility located at 1150 Eglinton Avenue East is approximately 330,000 square feet in size and was formerly the IBM Canada headquarters but has been vacant for several years¹. The second facility located at 844 Don Mills Road is approximately

880,000 square feet in size and was previously used for Celestica Inc.'s corporate head office, manufacturing and warehousing operations².

Don Mills is considered the city's first master-planned suburb following the end of the Second World War³. IBM had selected this site in the late 1940s to expand their production activities in Canada and it is considered the first manufacturing and office building complex

QUICK FACTS

Location

Toronto, Ontario

Project type

Master-planned community

Site size

24 hectares (60 acres)

Land uses

Mixed-use

Keywords/special features

Residential, commercial, infill, transit-oriented development, public space, active transportation

Website

<https://www.crosstowncommunity.ca>

Project address

844 Don Mills Road, 1150 and 1155 Eglinton Avenue East
Toronto, Ontario

Project Awards

2020 Brownie Award: Renew Development at a Neighbourhood Scale

Author

Rebecca Tom [in](#)

Editors

Christopher De Sousa, Mabel Mai

constructed in the Don Mills community⁴. The two buildings have been listed on the City's heritage register and evaluated by City staff as significant properties that represent Modernist Canadian architecture and a landmark of the Don Mills neighbourhood⁵. In order to acknowledge the property's historical associations and context, key features of both buildings will be retained and incorporated into the design of the development⁶.

Celestica Inc. had been intending to sell the property for a number of years as they wanted to move their corporate headquarters into a smaller, more compact space⁷. In 2015, Celestica sold the land to a group of developers, Diamond Corp., Lifetime Developments and Context Development⁸. As part of the terms of the sale, Celestica agreed to relocate their headquarters to one of the office buildings in the development as they had already moved their manufacturing operations to a facility in Newmarket⁹.

Assessment and Cleanup

Don Mills (ARH) Homes Ltd. contracted EXP Services Inc. to conduct a Phase 1 and Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessment in early 2019 for a small western section of the property where the former IBM Canada office building is located¹⁰. Based on the testing and assessment conducted in the Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessment, there were no contaminants or pollutants of concern in the soil or groundwater on this section of the property¹¹. A Record of Site Condition was filed in May of 2020.

Celestica's manufacturing and warehousing operations were located on the rest of the site and as a result, this section of land will require significant remediation and clean up¹². In early 2020, demolition for the manufacturing wing of 844 Don Mills began¹³. A majority of the materials will be sent to a sorting facility to be recycled and the heritage-protected features will be disassembled and reconstructed as they are integrated into the facade of the new building¹⁴. The owner, Don Mills (ARH) Homes Ltd. is currently completing a Risk Assessment for this section of the property with the Ministry of the Environment as it was determined that contaminants from the manufacturing activity, particularly a solvent used for cleaning computer chips, had infiltrated the soil and groundwater¹⁵.

Due to the large property size, the assessment



Figure 2. Aerial view of the former Celestica headquarters and manufacturing site (right) and IBM Canada headquarters (left).

and remediation process will take several years to complete as it will coincide with the phases of Crosstown Celestica's development¹⁶. Moreover, since the property will contain different land uses that vary in sensitivity and environmental standards, such as commercial, residential, open space and naturalized areas, there will be slightly different approaches to remediate each development block¹⁷. While designing the site plan for Crosstown Celestica, the developer strategically positioned blocks with the highest density where the greatest concentration of contaminants was located as they are required to excavate deep into the ground to build the foundation for these high-rise buildings¹⁸. This would allow them to excavate the soil, which will be treated offsite and prepare the site for constructing the underground parking facility and foundation of these buildings¹⁹.

Financing

The assessment and remediation work will be privately funded by Don Mills (ARH) Homes Ltd²⁰. Since the remediation will coincide with each phase of development, the sale of residential units on each development block will finance the cost of assessment, testing and cleanup²¹.

Planning and Redevelopment

The site was initially zoned as Industrial-Office Business Park based on the former City of North

York Zoning By-law and the vehicular ramp located at the southwest corner of the site was zoned as Semi-Public Open Space²². As part of the City of Toronto's Municipal Comprehensive Review and in response to a rezoning request from the property owner, City Council approved to convert the land to General Employment Areas, however, this did not permit residential use²³. On May 8, 2014, the Owner submitted a second Official Plan Amendment application to convert a majority of the land from Employment Areas to Mixed Use Areas²⁴. On December 1, 2017, the Owner submitted an appeal to the Local Appeal Planning Tribunal (LPAT) after City Council was unable to make a decision within the appropriate timeframe for their Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-Law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision²⁵. The City and the applicant reached a settlement offer in 2018 and in January of 2019, the LPAT issued their final order to allow the appeal of the draft plan of subdivision and approve the Official Plan Amendment²⁶.

This development proposal was also reviewed concurrently with the Don Mills Crossing Study and Secondary Plan²⁷. The three-phase study was initiated in 2016 by the City planning department to study the anticipated population growth at the intersection following the completion of the Eglinton Light Rail Transit (LRT). This was to ensure there was a coordinated plan in place to redevelop the area following sustainable and

transit-oriented development principles²⁸.

Public consultation meetings for Crosstown Celestica were held in 2017 and 2018 to provide updates on the project design and receive community input on the proposal²⁹. The city also conducted pop-up consultation sessions in popular community spaces such as the Ontario Science Centre, Flemingdon Park Library and the Thorncliffe Market Pop-Up³⁰. Respondents were in strong support of the recreational facilities and active transportation connections³¹. However, respondents were concerned about the residential tower heights, increased traffic congestion and the potential for additional ravine connections and naturalized trails³². Currently, the City is facilitating consultations for the conceptual design of Crosstown Park South, the first park that will be developed on the property³³.

Buildings

Upon completion, Crosstown Celestica will contain nearly 10,000 residents and 3,300 employees working in the two office buildings, childcare centre, community centre, and retail spaces³⁴. It is regarded as one of Toronto's largest developments in the past decade³⁵.

The development will contain 4,974 residential units in a range of dwelling types including three to four-storey townhouses, eight to ten-storey midrise buildings and 27 to 48 storey high-rise buildings³⁶. The majority of units will be built for the private market, but an affordable housing apartment will be constructed in the second phase of development³⁷. The two eight and nine-storey commercial office buildings will be at the

corner of Eglinton Avenue East and Don Mills Road³⁸. Retail spaces will also be located at the southeast corner of the property, fronting the two major arterial streets and along a pedestrian-oriented interior street³⁹ (see Figure 3).

The first phase of development includes a not-for-profit childcare centre and an underground public pedestrian connection from the office building to the Eglinton Crosstown LRT⁴⁰. Through a community benefits agreement, the City negotiated a twelve-million-dollar contribution and secured land on-site for a recreational and community centre⁴¹. Additionally, the City was able to secure lands on the northeast section of the site to relocate the Civitan Don Mills Arena⁴².

As part of the Tier 1 Toronto Green Standard (TGS) requirements, the developer will include electric vehicle sharing stations, auto-share spaces, and cycling infrastructure. The developer has also committed to providing TGS Tier 2 measures including either additional bike parking or publicly accessible short-term bike parking facilities with shelters and lockers. This is a positive addition given the number of active transportation paths that will be constructed⁴³.

In the second phase of the project, the developer will build a ravine trail connecting the development to E.T. Seaton Park and a pedestrian and cycling bridge over the CP railway in partnership with the City⁴⁴. A total of 15.6 acres of the property will be transferred into public ownership as parkland and ravine lands⁴⁵.

Key Challenges, Benefits and Lessons Learned

Crosstown Celestica earned a 2020 Brownie Award in the Development at a Neighbourhood Scale category for its commitment to developing a complete community that is transit-supportive and mixed-use to service new residents and the surrounding community⁴⁶. The Don Mills Corridor is anticipated to grow in population as the Eglinton LRT will begin operation in 2022. As such, City staff were in support of this development for its ability to intensify residential and employment opportunities on an underdeveloped property that was along a higher-order transit corridor⁴⁷. The ability to rezone a brownfield site to mixed-use without losing valuable employment numbers in Toronto was another promising factor when City staff were evaluating this development proposal⁴⁸.

Many buildings in the Don Mills community qualify for protection as heritage sites⁴⁹. Once a building or structure is listed on the City's heritage register, there are limitations on what a developer can do to modify the structure and it cannot be demolished⁵⁰. This case demonstrates a successful example of how a developer was able to intensify the use of the land while also meaningfully incorporating the property's history and cultural significance into the new design.

Due to the size of the development, there were multiple community benefits agreements negotiated for parks and open space, affordable housing, a community centre and active transportation connections⁵¹. The southwest section of the property is part of the Don Valley Ravine System and is subject to the Ravine Protection By-law⁵². The developer will be creating a ravine stewardship plan with the City to conserve the sustainability of the ravine system while creating naturalized trails and open space for the community⁵³. Upon completion, these lands will go into public ownership and demonstrates the importance of restoring naturalized areas in brownfield developments. Finally, members of the Don Mills community had expressed their longstanding advocacy to connect the Don River Trail system and create a functional cycling network⁵⁴. The active transportation connections not only improve the livability of the space for future residents but create a more seamless connection between the redevelopment and the surrounding neighbourhood.



Figure 3. Artistic rendering of the future residential towers and office buildings located at the south east corner of the development site.

Endnotes

- [1] Urban Metrics. (2014). DiamondCorp – Wynford Green Employment Area Impact Analysis. Retrieved from https://urbanmetrics.ca/portfolio_page/employment-area-impact-analysis/
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] Javed, N. (2009). Toronto's mother of all suburbs: Don Mills. Toronto Star. Retrieved from https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2009/03/21/torontos_mother_of_all_suburbs_don_mills.html
- [4] Archaeological Services Inc. (2019). Cultural Heritage and Resource Assessment Don Mills Crossing. Retrieved from <https://asiheritage.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Don-Mills-Crossing-CHRA.pdf>
- [5] City of Toronto (2020). Inclusion of the City of Toronto's Heritage Register, Intention to Designate under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, Alterations to a Heritage Property and Authority to Enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement – 1150 Eglinton Avenue East. Retrieved from <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.NY16.4>
- [6] Smee, M. (2020). Don Mills and Eglinton getting new neighbourhood but preserving heritage buildings an issue. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/don-mills-and-eglinton-getting-new-neighbourhood-but-preserving-heritage-buildings-an-issue-1.5423321>
- [7] McLean, S. (2019). Celestica sells 60.6-acre Toronto campus for development. RENX. Retrieved from <https://renx.ca/celestica-sells-60-5-acre-toronto-campus/>
- [8] City of Toronto. (2018). Letter from Stephen Diamond, DiamondCorp. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/pg/comm/communicationfile-83353.pdf>
- [9] McLean, S. (2019). Celestica sells 60.6-acre Toronto campus for development. RENX. Retrieved from <https://renx.ca/celestica-sells-60-5-acre-toronto-campus/>
- [10] Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (2020) Record of Site Condition #226759. Retrieved from <https://www.lrcsde.lrc.gov.on.ca/BFISWebPublic/pub/viewDetail?submissionId=226759>
- [11] EXP Services Inc (2020) Phase Two Conceptual Site Model. Retrieved from <https://www.lrcsde.lrc.gov.on.ca/BFISWebPublic/pub/viewDetail?submissionId=226759>
- [12] L. Payne, personal communication, February 19, 2021
- [13] Livabl (2020). Demolition well underway at One Crosstown Condos in East Toronto. Retrieved from <https://www.livabl.com/2020/05/demolition-underway-one-crosstown-condos-east-toronto.html>
- [14] Ibid.
- [15] L. Payne, personal communication, February 19, 2021
- [16] Ibid.
- [17] Ibid.
- [18] Ibid.
- [19] Ibid.
- [16] Ibid.
- [21] Ibid.
- [22] City of Toronto (2018). 844 Don Mills Road, 1150 and 1155 Eglinton Avenue East – Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision Applications – Request for Direction Report. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-115658.pdf>
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] City of Toronto (2020). 844 Don Mills Road, 1150 and 1155 Eglinton Avenue East – Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision Applications – Request for Direction Report. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/cc/bgrd/backgroundfile-146309.pdf>
- [25] Ibid.
- [26] Ibid.
- [27] City of Toronto (2018). 844 Don Mills Road, 1150 and 1155 Eglinton Avenue East – Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision Applications – Request for Direction Report. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-115658.pdf>
- [28] Ibid.
- [29] Ibid.
- [30] Ibid.
- [31] Ibid.
- [32] Ibid.
- [33] City of Toronto (n.d.). Crosstown Park South. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/construction-new-facilities/new-parks-facilities/crosstown-park-south/>
- [34] Smee, M. (2020). Don Mills and Eglinton getting new neighbourhood but preserving heritage buildings an issue. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/don-mills-and-eglinton-getting-new-neighbourhood-but-preserving-heritage-buildings-an-issue-1.5423321>
- [35] McLean, S. (2019). Celestica sells 60.6-acre Toronto campus for development. RENX. Retrieved from <https://renx.ca/celestica-sells-60-5-acre-toronto-campus/>
- [36] City of Toronto (2018). 844 Don Mills Road, 1150 and 1155 Eglinton Avenue East – Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision Applications – Request for Direction Report. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-115658.pdf>
- [37] Ibid.
- [38] Ibid.
- [39] Ibid.
- [40] Ibid.
- [41] Ibid.
- [42] Ibid.
- [43] Ibid.
- [44] Ibid.
- [45] Ibid.
- [46] Canadian Brownfields Network. (n.d.). Brownie Awards 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.canadianbrownfieldsnetwork.ca/brown-field-awards/brownies/2020-brownie-winners>
- [47] City of Toronto (2018). 844 Don Mills Road, 1150 and 1155 Eglinton Avenue East – Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision Applications – Request for Direction Report. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-115658.pdf>
- [48] J. Andreevski, personal communication, February 12, 2021
- [49] Smee, M. (2020). Don Mills and Eglinton getting new neighbourhood but preserving heritage buildings an issue. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/don-mills-and-eglinton-getting-new-neighbourhood-but-preserving-heritage-buildings-an-issue-1.5423321>
- [50] Ibid.
- [51] City of Toronto (2018). 844 Don Mills Road, 1150 and 1155 Eglinton Avenue East – Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision Applications – Request for Direction Report. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-115658.pdf>
- [52] Ibid.
- [53] Ibid.
- [54] Ibid.