

Canadian Brownfields Case Study

The Barrel Yards Redevelopment



Source: stonemiseconstruction.ca

Figure 1. The current state of the Barrel Yards redevelopment (2021)

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Barrel Yards development project is located in Waterloo, Ontario on the historic Joseph Seagram Mill and Distillery lands, bounded by Erb Street and Father David Bauer Drive. The City of Waterloo has a population of 137,420 and its top three employers are Sun Life Financial, University of Waterloo and Manulife Financial Corporation.¹ The Barrel Yards project is an upscale development that stretches over a 12-acre lot and contains 1,200 residential units as well as a one-acre park, hotel and commercial space.² The Barrel Yards redevelopment project was a 2016 finalist for a Brownie Award under the “redevelopment at the community scale” category.³ This development is being conducted by Auburn Developments Inc. and Turner Fleischer Architects Inc. The Project seeks to transform the once industrial land to an area that provides a mix of uses and offers a variety of housing options while preserving the site’s heritage. When the Barrel Yard’s land was tested, the ground water condition was deemed to be potable.⁴ However, there is a known pollutant in this part of the city in the groundwater that has to be constantly pumped to prevent further spread.⁵ The exact source of the pollutant in question is not known by the City of Waterloo, but it is linked to the area’s industrial past.⁶ To date, the Barrel Yards development has completed the construction of the Delta Waterloo hotel, as well as the construction of The Onyx and The Cooperage luxury residential buildings (Figure 1).

Site Characteristics and History

The Barrel Yards development has sought to transform vacant industrial land while also paying homage to the history that preceded the development. One way the development is paying tribute to the site’s history is by naming The Cooperage and The Onyx after factories that once stood on the site and nearby.⁷ The Cooperage is located on the site of the Canada

Barrels and Kegs (Canbar) factory (Figure 2).⁸ The barrel-making operation owned by Karl Mueller began in 1872 and supplied barrels needed for the Seagram Distillery’s Whiskey.⁹ The cooperage remained family-run until 1920 when the Seagram family bought the company following the death of Karl’s son and was renamed to Canada Barrels and Kegs.¹⁰ The Onyx is named after the Onyx Premium Flour that was milled on a nearby

QUICK FACTS

Location

Waterloo, ON

Project type

Multi-Use Development

Site size

12 Acres

Land uses

Residential, Commercial, Mixed-Use

Keywords/special features

Residential, Mixed-Use, Commercial, Industrial, Water Contamination

Website

<http://www.auburndev.com/neighbourhoods/the-barrel-yards/>

Project address

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Case studies were prepared as a course assignment by students enrolled in PL8312/PLE845: Brownfields & Sustainable Development, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Ryerson University (Winter 2021). 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 updates to the case studies, please contact chris.desousa@ryerson.ca

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property in the 1800s.¹¹ The flour mill was owned by William Hespeler and George Randall. In 1863 the two partners brought on William Roos and then, a year later, hired Joseph Emm Seagram.¹² Seagram eventually bought out the three partners in 1883 and changed the name to Joseph E. Seagram and Sons Limited.¹³ Seagram remained owner of the company until his death in 1919 when the company was sold to the Bronfman family.¹⁴ Not only do the names of the buildings hold historical significance but the development project is also incorporating displays of industrial artifacts that will be placed throughout the site.¹⁵ There will also be an inclusion of public art pieces that are related to the site's history.¹⁶ These industrial lands are a prominent landmark for the City of Waterloo as it represents the City's history of manufacturing during the 19th and 20th century.¹⁷ Although Waterloo's economy has moved beyond industrial manufacturing, the Barrel Yards Development represents the City's new role in supporting innovation, technology and academic communities.¹⁸ The Barrel Yards development is in close proximity to both the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University as well as a technology park, Sun Life and Manulife Financial offices.

Cleanup

In a Transition Notice from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks it was noted that the type of assessment used by the Qualified Person (QP) to determine the condition of the site was 'generic full depth', and they found the ground water condition to be potable.¹⁹ The owners of Canbar cleaned the site of their properties to the standards of the Ontario Ministry of the Environment which, for many industrial sites in this region, was not the case.²⁰

Part of the construction process involved dewatering the site: an operation that was completed in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of the Environment, who provided their consent for this action to be performed.²¹ The Ministry stipulated that the water removed from the site would have to undergo regular testing to demonstrate that it did not contain high levels of toxic chemicals that had previously been found in the groundwater of the surrounding area.²² One of the chemicals chosen for monitoring was trichloroethylene,²³ an industrial solvent that had been observed in the area.²⁴ The land was tested twice a week and there was



Figure 2. Canada Barrels and Kegs factory (1942)

no detection of contaminated water, which the project manager noted as "being unusual for a site of this size."²⁵

Planning

Before construction could occur on The Barrel Yards site, a change to the existing street grid was needed as several streets were extended to connect with Father David Bauer Drive which extends through the centre of the property (Figure 3).²⁶ The addition of these roads will improve access to the site in order to allow for better connectivity to the surrounding community and amenities. The Barrel Yards site was also

rezoned to allow for mixed-use office, residential mixed-use, and residential that allows for the construction of the freehold townhouses that are planned for the site.²⁷

Due to the size of The Barrel Yards site the project has been broken down into several stages, the first stage involved the construction of the Delta Waterloo Hotel and the underground parking garage²⁸ which were completed in 2014.²⁹ The second phase included the construction of The Cooperage residential buildings on Father Bauer Drive in 2014.³⁰

Figure 3. Rendering of The Barrel Yards development (2014)



The third stage was the construction of The Onyx residential buildings on the north end of property and was completed in 2015.³¹ In 2007 The Barrel Yards Master Plan indicated that the project would be made up of seven phases.³²

The Barrel Yards development is part of The City of Waterloo's *Uptown Public Realm Strategy*, which aims to direct growth within the City's Uptown and ensure that the development that does occur is "complemented by a high quality, inviting, and vibrant public realm."³³ One of the ways the City is supporting this strategy is by incorporating privately owned public spaces (POPS) in its Uptown region. The Barrel Yards Development supports this with its inclusion of a parkette in its design.³⁴

Financing

The City of Waterloo purchased the property along with others in the area for 3.9 million dollars in 1997 when it was vacant industrial land.³⁵ The City hoped that in acquiring these lands they would be able to control redevelopment in the area. One of the actions they took to encourage the development of this property, along with others in the area, was to waive the development charges for Auburn Developments, which ultimately saved them around 23 million dollars.³⁶ This acted as an incentive for the 350 million dollar Barrel Yards development, which aims to provide luxury residences and facilities for Waterloo's

burgeoning institutional and professional communities.

Buildings

The 350 million dollar Barrel Yards project spans over ten buildings; The Onyx, The Cooperage, The Royal Oak, Granite Hills, Delta Waterloo hotel, an office tower as well as three townhome lots (Figure 4).³⁷ The future buildings will range from 8 to 25-storeys tall, making it the most dense collection tall buildings in the area.³⁸ There will also be a two-level underground parking garage to not only provide the necessary parking to support the large number of residents on the site but also protect the pedestrian-oriented environment above.³⁹

The Barrel Yards development has a total of ten buildings and six of those will be reserved for residential use.⁴⁰ The development also includes a long-term care residence, the Delta Waterloo hotel and an office complex.⁴¹ Located at the north end of the site, The Onyx consists of two 25-storey buildings and contains its own parking structure. Located on the west side of the site, The Cooperage consists of two 22-storey buildings, with an additional connecting section that contains six live/work units. The Delta Waterloo Hotel located at the south end of the site has a total of nine storeys. Both of the 10-storey office buildings, located at the southeast corner of the site will have commercial retail at the street level.⁴² The development plans

show three freehold townhome lots on the west side of the site but those along with the office buildings, the 10-storey long-term care home and two, 18-storey, residential buildings have not yet been constructed.

The Barrel Yards development appears to be progressing at a slower rate than what was originally intended by Auburn Developments Inc. but for reasons that are unknown. Originally, the final phases of the project were set to begin through 2016,⁴³ but recent updates have stated that the project is currently on phase six (out of seven), which includes the construction of the 18-storey long-term care home.⁴⁴ Stonerise Construction has reported that they expect the construction of the live/work spaces to be completed in 2025.⁴⁵

Final Thoughts

The Barrel Yards development is an example of how a city can use industrial lands to better serve a growing community. The once vacant land is now providing a variety of uses and will help to stimulate the economy of its downtown core. The development's proximity to Waterloo Park, community facilities as well as Waterloo's LRT and downtown, makes living in the Barrel Yards an attractive prospect for young professionals or people from the suburbs who want the conveniences of a condo or apartment in an urban setting.

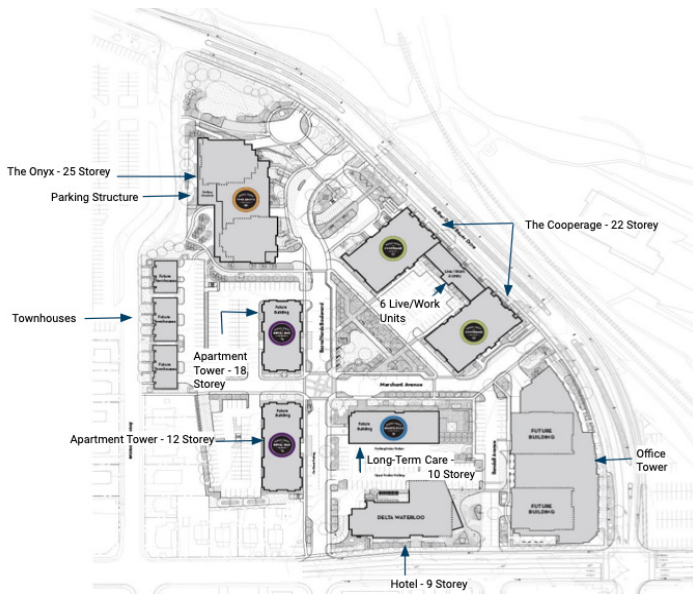


Figure 4. The building layout of The Barrel Yards development

Endnotes

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