

Canadian Brownfields Case Study

Walkerville Stones

QUICK FACTS

Location

Windsor, Ontario

Project type

Excavation and Disposal

Site size

0.8 acres

Land uses

Small-scale residential and commercial

Keywords/special features

Townhouses, heritage, post-industrial decline, factory, fire, mixed use

Website

<https://www.walkervillestones.com/>

Project address

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Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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Source: Walkerville Stones Facebook Page

Figure 1: Artistic rendering of the Walkerville Stones townhouses.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Walkerville Stones is a small-scale residential and commercial development in Windsor, Ontario. It was the first development project taken on by the owner but proved to be a successful and relatively straightforward process. The vision of the project aligned with current zoning by-laws and remediation was a standard process of excavating and disposing of soil. Walkerville Stones was financially supported by a number of incentives offered by the city and province, but the money received was small relative to the budget of the project. This project makes for a particularly interesting case study because of its industrial heritage and its strategic location between the Walkerville and Ford City neighbourhoods. Future development of nearby tracts of land are planned, making this project a key catalyst for positive neighbourhood change.

The Walkerville Stones project is a block of 12 live/work townhouses in Windsor, Ontario between the neighbourhoods of Walkerville and Ford City. Windsor is a medium-sized city approximately 350 kilometres southwest of Toronto. It borders the United States with Detroit, Michigan immediately to its north.

Each of the 12 townhouses in the Walkerville Stones project includes approximately 1,500 square feet of living space on the main and second floors and 800 square feet of commercial space on the lower level. All units have a detached garage and parking for residents and/or businesses operating on the lower level. See Figure 1 for an artistic rendering of the project.

This is the first development project by Ashok Sood, owner and operator of multiple local businesses nearby the Walkerville Stones project. His businesses include Champion Products, a wholesale distributor, and the City Market, a local farmer's market which opened in 2015. In addition, Sood owns multiple tracts of undeveloped land in the neighbourhood. The land was bought over the years for low prices due to its contamination but remained unused. These purchases include the Walkerville Stones site, a small tract of land to the project's south, and another 17 acres of land behind the City Market. Sood has tentative plans to develop all of the land with additional townhouses and condos in the future.

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

The opinions expressed in this case study are those of the authors only and do not represent the opinions and views of either Ryerson University, the School of Urban and Regional Planning, or the Canadian Brownfields Network.

Site History

This 0.8 acre site used to be home to the Ohio-based Seagrave Fire Apparatus Company. The Seagrave factory was built in 1904 and was one of Walkerville's last remaining original industrial buildings. Between 1904 and 1923, the Seagrave factory built Canada's first motorized fire engines which they shipped around the country. Later, the building was occupied by Border Cities Wire & Iron Works, then a cabinet making operation, and body shop. The historic building was admired by the community and was considered a valuable representation of the area's industrial heritage, despite its neglected appearance (Figure 2). Unfortunately, the building was damaged in a 2007 fire and was erroneously approved for demolition in 2008. Up until the construction of Walkerville Stones, the site had remained vacant and unused.

Neighbourhood Context

The Walkerville Stones site is located on Walker Road, the border between the Walkerville and Ford City neighbourhoods (Figure 3). Both neighbourhoods are among the oldest in Windsor and have robust industrial histories. Walkerville, to the west of the site, was founded by Hiram Walker, owner and producer of Canadian Club Whiskey in the late 1800s. Walker was directly involved with the development of the area. He built his distillery there and also supported the development of amenities and homes for his workers, many of which are still standing as heritage sites today (Figure 4). Ford City developed to the east of Walkerville in the early 1900s when Gordon McGregor founded the Ford Motor Company of Canada. Ford City is often considered the birthplace of the Canadian automobile industry.

Despite their similar histories of industry and prosperity, the two neighbourhoods present a stark contrast today. Walkerville thrives as a heritage district and tourist destination while Ford City has suffered more directly from industrial decline and neighbourhood blight. Despite their geographic proximity, average household income in Walkerville is \$88K, more than double that of Ford City. Developments like Walkerville Stones are part of a larger strategy to better connect the two neighbourhoods for collective growth and the opportunity to piggyback on one another's success.

Major landmarks near Walkerville Stones include Willistead Park, Willistead Manor, and



Figure 2: The former Seagrave Fire Apparatus Company building, prior to demolition.

the Windsor ViaRail station. The surrounding area on Walker Road also has a growing commercial presence, with stores and restaurants like the City Market, Chapter Two Brewery, The Mush Hub, and Walkerville Eatery. The area is well served by three of Windsor's bus lines.

Planning Process

The development of Walkerville Stones was relatively simple due to the location's existing combined/mixed-use zoning. This type of zoning allows for a mixture of residential and commercial land use, which was satisfied well by the development's combined dwelling unit space on the main and second floors and the commercial space on the lower level. Because

no zoning by-law amendments were needed, development only required site plan control and severance to create 12 lots from 6 existing lots. Severances were granted during a Committee of Adjustment meeting held in September 2020. Community members had the opportunity to share input during this meeting, but no community statements were made. Beyond the Committee of Adjustment meetings, no additional public meetings were held. The general sentiment from residents and city council was positive as it was believed that this project would have a positive impact on the community. While there is no secondary plan governing the site, the project aligns well with the Ford City Community Improvement Plan which has specific goals



Figure 3: Map of site and its surrounding neighbourhood context.

related to connectivity and aesthetic transformation. Overall, this project is viewed as a good execution of the city's vision for the area and a step in the right direction towards bridging the Walkerville and Ford City neighbourhoods.

Assessment & Clean-Up

Site assessment was conducted in April and May of 2019 and the record of site condition was filed that following September. The record outlines a number of contaminants in the soil, including petroleum hydrocarbons, copper, lead, zinc, and a few others. Such contaminants are likely related to the site's former uses as a manufacturing facility and the 2007 fire that damaged the building that used to be on the site.

Due to the small size of the land, remediation was a relatively quick and inexpensive process. Only 309 cubic metres of soil were deemed a risk and were excavated and transported to a licensed landfill for disposal. There was no need for additional soil to be brought in and no ongoing soil or groundwater management or monitoring systems were necessary.

Policy & Financing

Over the last decade, the City of Windsor has made a concerted effort to provide incentives for brownfield redevelopment. These efforts were launched in 2010 with the publication of the Brownfield Redevelopment Strategy and the Brownfield Redevelopment Community Improvement Plan. The Brownfield

Redevelopment Community Improvement Plan lays out specific financial incentives available to brownfield owners and developers. This includes five types of programs: feasibility study grants, environmental site assessment grants, brownfield property tax assistance, brownfield rehabilitation grants, and brownfield development charge exemptions. The Walkerville Stones project took advantage of almost all programs, with the exception of the feasibility study grants. The maximum possible funding available for all four programs was \$231K of which the project was expected to redeem about \$125K to \$200K, depending on actual incurred expenses.

Due to the simple remediation process discussed previously, clean-up made up only 8% of the project's total budget. While financial programs and incentives provided some assistance, the incentives were likely not the primary trigger for making this project financially feasible. However, the value of the incentives was palpable in that the allure of financial assistance sparked a conversation about development earlier than perhaps would have happened otherwise.

Overall, these incentives proved to be mutually beneficial for the owner and the city. The owner was able to save money and improve his profit margin. For the city, benefits will be seen through an expected annual property tax increase from \$4K to over \$24K. The increase will take effect once the lifespan of the grant programs expire.

Challenges & Areas for Improvement

Overall, the Walkerville Stones project was a successful and well-executed brownfield remediation. The clean-up was simple, the project was supported by local residents, and the vision was shared by the owner and the city. However, some small hurdles inevitably emerged. One example was the owner's lack of experience in land development, brownfield remediation, and townhouse construction. This required extra time and assistance from the municipal planning office but proved to be a positive learning experience for all. The skills and knowledge gained by the owner and the relationship cultivated with the city will likely simplify and support future development in the surrounding lands.

Despite the overall success of the project, one potential area of improvement is related to the size and variety of units offered. All 12 townhouses were designed with the same layout and floorplan of 1,500 square feet of living space, two bedrooms, three bathrooms, and 800 square feet of commercial space on the lower level. While such a layout may appeal to young couples or empty nesters, a more diverse set of both smaller and larger floorplans may have attracted more single-person households or mature families, who collectively make up over 75% of the Walkerville population. Attracting a more diverse group of residents through a variety of floorplan options would add even more vibrancy and activity to the area.

Conclusion

The Walkerville Stones project is a small but mighty example of successful brownfield redevelopment. It is the first of what appears to be numerous upcoming developments on Walker Road that will better connect Walkerville and Ford City. Already, a record of site condition has been filed for the site south of Walkerville Stones where development of a second set of townhouses is being explored. That, combined with tentative plans for the 17 acres of empty land to the east and the growing commercial presence in the area, signifies hope and potential for an attractive and complete community. Such a renewal honors the legacy of the area's prosperous industrial history, executes on the city's brownfield strategy, offers new housing opportunities for the community, and enhances the public realm.



Figure 4: Hiram Walker's heritage townhouses on Monmouth Road built for his employees located directly behind Walkerville Stones. These were part of the inspiration for the brownstone design of Walkerville Stones.

Source: Border City Living

Endnotes

1. Greg Atkinson, "Subject: Brownfield Redevelopment Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Application Submitted by 1206738 Ontario Limited for 933-963 Walker Road (Ward 4)," Council Report (Windsor: City of Windsor, April 8, 2019).
2. Greg Atkinson, Brownfields and Walkerville Stones Interview, Zoom, February 12, 2021.
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4. Atkinson, Brownfields and Walkerville Stones Interview; Carl Morgan, "Seagrave: Birthplace of the Modern Firetruck," Walkerville Times, accessed February 20, 2021, <http://www.walkervilletimes.com/seagrave.htm>.
5. "History of Walkerville," Visit Walkerville, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://visitwalkerville.com/history>.
6. Ibid.
7. "Ford City Community Improvement Plan" (City of Windsor, July 2018).
8. Simply Analytics, Household by Income, Average Household Income, Census Tracts CT0037.00 & CT0038.00
9. City of Windsor, "Transit Windsor," May 2019, <https://www.citywindsor.ca/visitors/Maps/PublishingImages/WM-012%20Transit%20Windsor.pdf>.
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13. Ford City Community Improvement Plan. (2019). City of Windsor.
14. Ed Sleiman, Walkerville Stones Interview, Phone, February 16, 2021.
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16. Ibid.
17. "Brownfield Redevelopment Community Improvement Plan," n.d.
18. Atkinson, Brownfields and Walkerville Stones Interview.
19. Ibid.
20. Atkinson, "Subject: Brownfield Redevelopment Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Application Submitted by 1206738 Ontario Limited for 933-963 Walker Road (Ward 4)."
21. Simply Analytics, % Households, Middle Age Families, School Age Families, 2020; % Households by Size of Households, 1 person, 2020 (Census Tract CT0037.00)
22. "Record of Site Condition for 1031 WALKER ROAD," accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.lrcsde.lrc.gov.on.ca/BFISWebPublic/pub/viewDetail?submissionId=227445>.
23. Atkinson, Brownfields and Walkerville Stones Interview.