

## Building a neighbourhood — from parking lot to “people place”

Very often visions are nothing more than unfulfilled dreams. St. Lawrence Neighbourhood is a rare exception. In less than three years the project has moved from the realm of visions to reality — through the concerted efforts of three levels of government and the determination of the citizens of Toronto.

St. Lawrence Neighbourhood in Toronto is a \$145-million project that will, in the mid-1980s, consist of homes, schools, stores, and recreation and health care for about 10,000 people. The first families will move in early in 1979.

The area is steeped in history: first established as the old town of York in 1793, it is one of the few remaining links with a past dating back nearly 200 years. However, time, neglect, and deterioration took their toll on the once thriving neighbourhood, leaving it one of Toronto's most unsightly and underused areas.

The aim of the planners was to provide homes for all income groups, with particular emphasis on housing for families and singles of low and moderate income. The preservation of buildings worth saving — and there are several — was also of the utmost importance. They were to be woven into the St. Lawrence fabric to blend old with new.

Involvement by non-profit and co-operative groups will mean that the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood is not likely to become a fashionable quarter for the more affluent at the expense of those with very modest incomes. Nor will there be huge profits for developers at the expense of the taxpayers, even though the private sector will also be making a significant investment in housing, both for sale and rent, as well as in industrial establishments.

### Community feeling

Rather, St. Lawrence Neighbourhood is to be a “people place” — a neighbourhood in which people can live, work, and enjoy the amenities of downtown Toronto while living in a “real” community. The parking lots, junkyards, and dilapidated buildings that now occupy the site will be replaced by up to 3,000 housing units, schools, commercial facilities, parking structures, recreational facilities and parks.

The social and physical aspects of St. Lawrence Neighbourhood have been established as follows:

It is to be an extension of the city and not an isolated project.

The streets are to be designed as the focus for all activities within the neighbourhood.

All family housing will be directly accessible from street level.

The buildings will be erected by public, private, non-profit and entrepreneurial developers to provide homes for several income groups under a variety of tenures.

Whenever possible, buildings possessing historical value will be retained, and the general historical character of the area will be restored and preserved.

Buildings serving a variety of uses are to be encouraged.

### Schools experiment

An innovative approach has been taken in the provision of schools, probably the first such development in Canada. The two schools — separate and public — will be on the first and second floors of an eight-storey building. The rest of the building houses apartments with some commercial space at ground level. Classrooms for the “two schools in one” will be on opposite sides of twin general-purpose rooms, separated by folding doors. The doors can be opened to provide more than 370 m<sup>2</sup> of space for school or com-

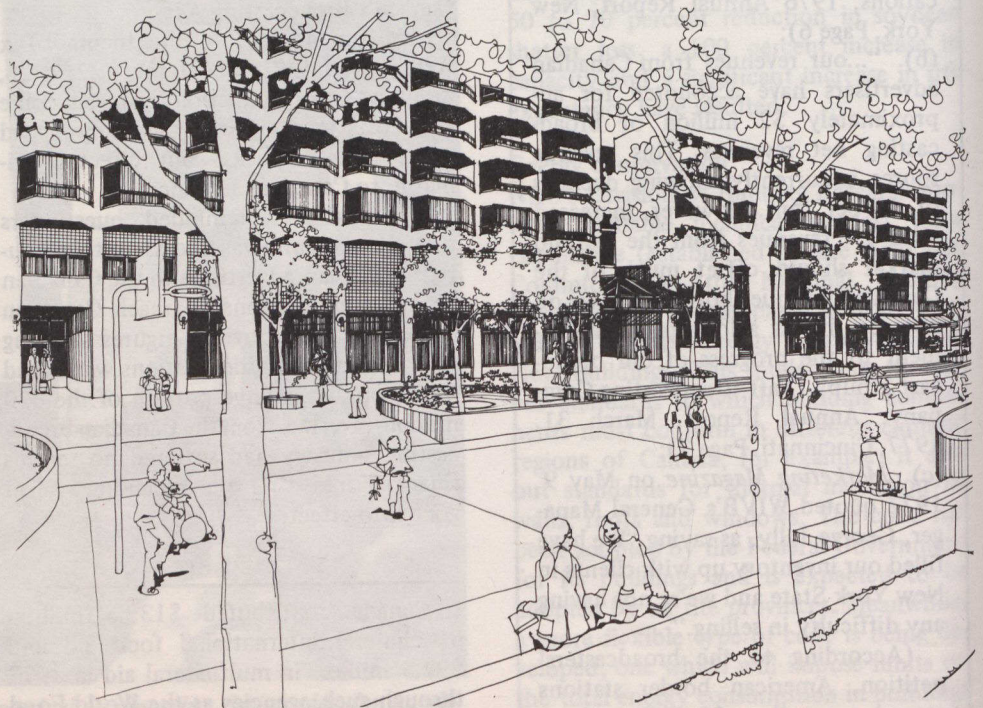
munity activities. Even the schools' outdoor play area will be shared by students and public alike. The 4,000-m<sup>2</sup> area will be owned by the city, but the Metropolitan Toronto Separate School Board and the Toronto Board of Education will share development costs.

### Non-profit housing

The five projects now under construction include four non-profit co-operative housing projects, and one non-profit rental project. Non-profit organizations are those in which no part of the income is payable or available for the personal benefit of any resident, member, or shareholder. Co-operative housing is built or bought by a group of people, to be jointly owned by those who will occupy it.

Financing by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation includes start-up funds to permit the initial development studies, and 100 percent loans with an interest reduction grant resulting in an effective mortgage rate of 8 per cent for 50 years. In addition, 10 per cent of the project cost need not be repaid. The federal, provincial and metropolitan governments share additional on-going subsidies for 25 per cent of the units on a cost-shared basis (50 per cent, 42.5 and 7.5).

*(The foregoing, condensed article, was written by Paul Wright for Habitat, Vol. 21, No. 2.)*



One of several projects planned for the new community, the Jarvis/Wilton building will have retail stores at ground level, schools on first two floors, apartments above.