

Habitat for Humanity's foray into the high-rise market

New partnership.

Organization providing eight new condo units for low-income families



CONDO TRENDS
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Habitat for Humanity is known for building low-rise housing at several construction sites across the city with the help of an army of volunteers and proceeds from their ReStore outlets. Now they are getting involved in Toronto's downtown high-rise housing market.

Habitat for Humanity Toronto is a non-profit housing organization established in 1988. Their mission is to build simple and affordable homes in partnership with low-income families.

More than 20,000 volunteers contribute almost 100,000 hours of their time and talent to Habitat each year.

Habitat has partnered with Diamond Corp., developer of the 35-storey, 159 Wellesley condominium project. In a new trend that will see the intensification of several side streets east of Yonge Street, the building designed by Quadrangle Architects will occupy the site of a former gas station.

"From my perspective, it's just a wonderful opportunity to get home ownership back into the city core that's affordable for our families. The core represents a huge opportunity from a community perspective," says acting Habitat Toronto CEO, Bruce Johnson.

Habitat has plans for more sites in the downtown core, and leads the way ahead of a proposal currently in front of city council that will permit affordable condominium ownership as a community benefit under section 37 of the official plan.

"The councillor in that area, along with Diamond Corp., have taken that initiative to say we know it's going to happen in time, let's do it first. Let's be the innovator," says Johnson.

Section 37 of the plan-



Two renderings of the 35-storey, 159 Wellesley condominium project. CONTRIBUTED

ning act allows the city of Toronto to approve increases in height or density in return for community benefits.

This allows builders certain concessions in consideration of giving something back to the com-

munity, such as parks, community centres or public art.

Previously, section 37 benefits for affordable housing only applied to rental units. Habitat is hoping that this will be extended to condominium ownership.

The builder will sell a number of condo units to Habitat at below market value and the difference would count toward their section 37 contribution.

According to Johnson, even with high-rise condo units, there's still a lot of

work to be performed by Habitat's volunteers.

"Diamond Corp. is delivering a shell to us so we have all the interior of the unit to do, so that's drywall, the painting, the flooring, the kitchen and bathroom vanities, the fixtures."