

Tower Renewal Project Series

PLANNERS PONDER

Inherited densities

By Michael McClelland and Graeme Stewart

For Toronto the most significant planning question may not be the form and placement of new density, but how to turn our enormous pockets of inherited high density into genuinely sustainable and complete communities.

The density of Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods makes this city unique. In fact, surprisingly, Toronto has a denser metropolitan area than **Chicago**, **Los Angeles**, or even Greater **New York City**. This is not the result of the city core but rather thanks to apartment neighbourhoods like Bathurst and Steeles, Yonge and Eglinton or Thorncliffe Park found throughout the city. The towers at Kipling and Steeles give that community a residential density nearly three times that of a traditional downtown neighbourhood like the Annex. Understanding how density works in our city gives us an almost counter-intuitive sense of urbanism.

But there is more to density. The province's growth plan proposes that density should be calculated as a combination of the number of residents and the number of jobs and recommends a target of 400 resident/jobs per hectare in urban growth centres like Toronto. The plan does not define an appropriate ratio, but with the aim of promoting complete communities it recognizes that neighbourhoods that work well have a mix of both a resident population and employment opportunities.

In comparing neighbourhoods we can see marked differences using this ratio. In the downtown core, streets like



View from Yonge and Eglinton looking east towards Flemingdon Park

College in Little Italy and Bloor in the Annex provide their residential neighbourhoods with restaurants and shops and diverse employment opportunities. But many apartment neighbourhoods, with their very large resident populations, lack the amenities and jobs common to these inner city neighbourhoods. Some could be characterized as employment deserts—all residents, no jobs. In other cases, such as Jane and Finch, a mix of uses was planned from the beginning and does exist, but on the ground it is characterized by single-use zoning, large underutilized spaces and a dependence on the car to get from place to place.

As cities throughout North America grapple with the challenge of sprawl, density is repeatedly stated as the answer. In this regard, Toronto is ahead of the game. The future lies in its apartment neighbourhoods.

*Michael McClelland is a principal and Graeme Stewart is the project architect for Tower Renewal with E.R.A. Architects. The Tower Renewal Project, spearheaded by the mayor, is being developed in collaboration with E.R.A. Architects and an interdepartmental municipal staff working group with collaboration from Toronto Community Housing Corporation, the University of Toronto, CMHC, Toronto Atmospheric Fund and the Clinton Foundation, among others. **NRU***

DENSITY - Toronto Neighbourhoods



Comparing density in Toronto Neighbourhood: Residential density within larger neighbourhoods and the apartment clusters within them.

Source: StatsCan, E.R.A. Architects and the University of Toronto