

PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE



Rob Jowett

A new development partnership will bring Toronto the latest iteration of mass timber construction technology, with project proponents promising to develop the first mass timber condominium project in the city, helping to address the city's need for missing middle housing affordably and within reasonable timelines.

R-Hauz, Windmill Developments, and Leader Lane are joining forces on a proposal for a mass timber passive house condominium development in Etobicoke. The development would include three six-storey condominium buildings on sites located in close proximity to one another and would deliver a total 83 units. The development team is not releasing the exact address at this time but the project site for the proposed development is located in the vicinity of the Mimico GO station.

Mass timber is a form of processed wood that is being looked to increasingly as a sustainable new building material with many advantages over steel and concrete construction. The material is easier to construct with, can be largely pre-fabricated off-site and assembled at the construction site quickly,

is more environmentally sustainable, and is more aesthetically appealing to users. Mass timber also has better fire safety outcomes as laminated wood chars and stops burning, as opposed to steel, which melts and causes a structure to collapse or compromises structural integrity and the building has to be demolished. A formal development proposal

is expected to be submitted to the city in the spring.

“There’s a [mass timber] component [to the project, and] there’s a broader modular, integrated design approach, as mechanical and everything is so tied in together,” Windmill Developments CEO **Jonathan Westeinde** told *NRU*. “We see this being more of a consistent program that we would run

out in many geographies across Canada for this specific product.”

The proposal is the latest evolution of R-Hauz’s mid-rise mass timber product. The company has been working to find a way to create a repeatable design that can be easily constructed on a variety of sites across the city, especially on small sites with relatively constrained development permissions. The company built a pilot of its design at 1598-1604 Queen Street East [see ‘*Faster, Cheaper, Simpler*’, *NRU Toronto edition*, August 21, 2020] and has been refining the design ever since.

“One area of our tech that’s evolving quickly [is] air handling, air exchange, heating and cooling,” R-Hauz founder and developer **Leith Moore** told *NRU*. “We’re well down the road of decarbonisation, so we had no gas in any of our products. But now, we’re supplementing

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Photos of R-Hauz’s modular mid-rise mass timber buildings located on Queen Street East, which the company has been developing as a repeatable product that can be deployed across the city. R-Hauz has teamed up with Windmill and Leader Lane to deliver three new condominium buildings near the Mimico GO Station.

SOURCE: K&G&A

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[energy use in areas] where the size of the projects are allowed to do geothermal.”

Moore says the design is meant to help provide missing middle housing to the city, especially on sites where physical or policy constraints make development challenging. He notes that a lot of areas of the city where moderate intensification is allowed are hard to develop in practice as small sites and low height and density limits make designing buildings that fit into policy and can be economically viable at the same time can be extremely challenging. This is especially true along the city’s main streets and avenues like the Queen Street East site where R-Hauz first piloted a modular mass timber product. The use of mass timber construction technology makes projects far simpler and cheaper, reducing a lot of

costs and allowing buildings to be completed and habitable more quickly than traditional construction methods.

Moore says the project team will source its wood from **ELEMENT5**, an Ontario company that processes mass timber building materials in St. Thomas. Until recently, there have not been any mass timber production facilities in Ontario, and most of the wood was being imported from B.C. or Austria. He says working with **ELEMENT5** makes the supply chain much simpler and further lowers material costs and the overall timelines for a project.

“It’s a big difference, being able to know you can get [mass timber], you can get it quickly and you’ve got a reliable supply,” says Moore. “You’re not having to buy [construction materials] way in advance and then stockpile and pay for storage for

a long time. So, I think it really will allow more companies to make use of it.”

Moore says mass timber modular projects lend themselves well to working through the city’s development approvals processes as well. He says that because the design is repeatable and most of the buildings R-Hauz is constructing are very similar, planning department staff are familiar with the design and application review can run more smoothly. The buildings are also designed to conform to city policy, greatly streamlining the development approvals process.

“Because of the scale of this type of development—six storeys, pretty much compliant with the mid-rise guidelines, and really not pushing the envelope on density, as well as the elimination of any below grade excavation and parking—[it] is really [advantageous],” Leader Lane partner **Don Manlapaz** told *NRU*. “The strategy here on the approvals side with the municipality is really to take the path of least resistance and make a proposal that is as close to as-of-right [planning permissions] as possible. So, we’ll be pursuing a host of minor variances, facilitated through a site plan review. So, really, the planning and approvals process is compressed from anywhere from 24 months [or more] down to eight.”

Manlapaz says that pending approvals, the development team intends to begin

construction in 2023, and is expecting to complete the project by the end of next year.

All three Mimico properties are receiving funding from the One Planet Living Real Estate Fund, which provides financial support for projects that improve the livability of communities. The fund is run by **Epic Investment Services**, which brands itself as the first private Canadian real estate investment fund dedicated to improving the livability of communities.

Moore says R-Hauz plans to look at how its mid-rise condominium product can be adapted for laneway and garden suite construction, both of which have been permitted as-of-right for many residential properties across the city. 🌱

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