

Downtown Toronto condo building set to include affordable rental units

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An expensive condo building slated to start going up a year from now near the Air Canada Centre downtown will include a rare feature — some affordable rental units.

Ten York, a 62-storey tower with a four-storey podium set for completion near late 2016, is to have 694 condo units, 12 of which will be owned and managed as co-ops by the Co-op Housing Federation of Toronto.

One might say that, given the relatively small number of affordable units in play here, it's no big deal. But Toronto condo developers have typically been loath to include any such units in their buildings, citing customer resistance.

But officials with Tridel, a well-established brand in the development industry, say their highrise is close to selling out — units go from \$350,000 to \$4 million — and their customers know full well what they're buying into.

Details about the building's affordable units were shared with condo purchasers through written materials and during sales presentations.

"From the consumer's perspective it didn't seem to be an issue, because we sold all those suites," said Jim Ritchie, a Tridel spokesperson.

The move to include affordable units in condo buildings is part of a growing push, certainly downtown, toward "inclusionary zoning," says Adam Vaughan, the city councillor for the area that covers the Harbour and York Sts. address for Ten York.

"What we're saying is, every building should have some economic diversity in it because that's a good way to get housing built for people who need affordable (units) downtown," the councillor says.

The \$360 million Ten York development is among close to a dozen medium- to highrise condo buildings in Vaughan's ward — either under construction or planned — that will have an affordable rental component, Vaughan explains.

The total number in all these buildings is about 40 to 50, Vaughan said.

“Is it going to solve the problem of people on the waiting list for affordable housing in Toronto? No, I’m not naïve. But it’s better than doing nothing, and for a decade we’ve been doing nothing,” Vaughan said, referring to the shortage of new affordable housing projects in the city.

“If we started to roll this out as a city-wide program, we might be in a position where we start attacking the housing waiting list,” he added.

Rents at or below Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation’s average market rent are considered to be “affordable” under the City of Toronto’s Official Plan definition.

For instance, the average market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Toronto area is \$1,149.

Tenants renting Ten York’s affordable units will be people who are “employed, and meet certain thresholds and criteria,” says Steve Upton, Tridel’s vice president of development and planning.

Through so-called “Section 37” funds — money given to the city by builders for community benefits such as daycare centres or park improvements, in exchange for additional building height or density — Tridel is providing about \$5 million for Ten York’s affordable units.

The project was approved by city council earlier this month. There are a few minor steps ahead before the project can proceed, including finalizing the zoning bylaw and a small amendment to the city’s Official Plan.