

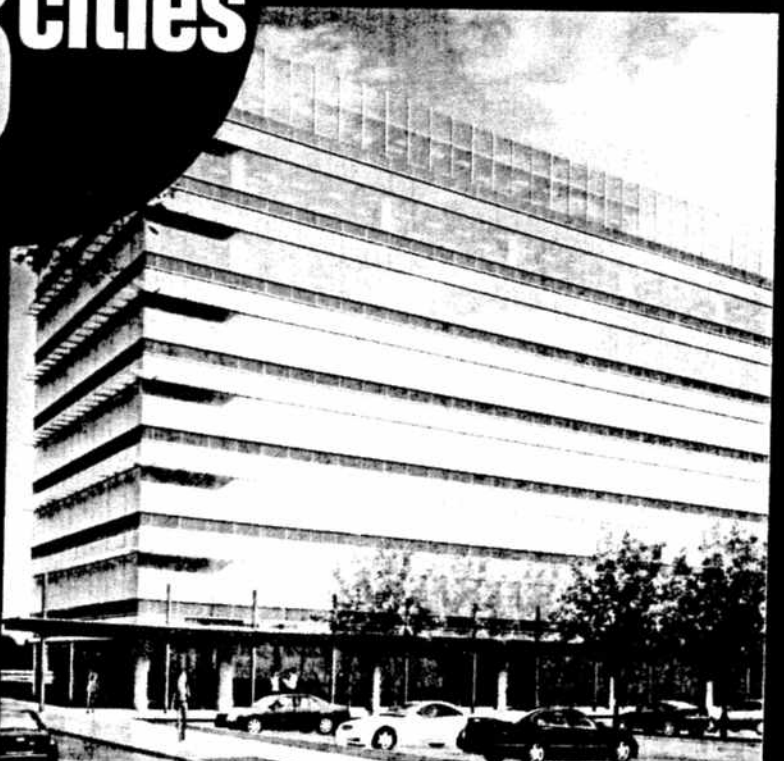
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A tale
of **3** cities



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HAMILTON'S INNOVATIVE REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES DENSITY BONUSES
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS EDMONTON'S NEW VANCOUVER STYLE DEVELOPMENT

with our process. We need to learn from this kind of example and possibly be more proactive when we realize there is a site pending for redevelopment. We could go in and do a public consultation even before we receive an actual development application."

Century Park will introduce what Backstrom calls a "Vancouver style" of development, featuring high-rise towers encircled with amenities and landscaped greenspace, which neighbouring residents haven't necessarily seen in other higher density developments. "It's bringing those kinds of design elements to Edmonton," he says.

"Once this project is finished, I think this will be a community that city planners will come to visit from all over North America," Schluessel predicts.

After approving the Century Park redevelopment, Edmonton Council opted to dedicate the City's allocation of federal gas tax revenue to realize its long envisioned plan to extend the LRT. "Even from the early '70s there were plans to extend rapid transit down there, but that funding opportunity directly led to the decision to extend the LRT now," Backstrom says.

metre extension earlier this year and is expected to reach Century Park, which will be the terminus of the new route, by 2009. The \$595-million project also includes four new LRT stations, two parkades, two connecting busways, a pedestrian underpass and 26 new LRT vehicles. The federal government's contribution will be approximately \$107 million.

AFFORDABILITY WITH PRIVACY SHAPES WINNIPEG HOUSING INNOVATION

Four new developments in Winnipeg will offer an unprecedented housing format for renters with low incomes. So-called pocket suites provide tenants with 210 square feet of self-contained living space, including kitchens, bathrooms and individual entrances. The two-storey, eight-unit complexes fit onto 24-foot lots, and each of the four projects also contains a slightly larger 243-square-foot wheelchair accessible unit.

With scarce capital dollars for affordable housing more often channelled to projects for families and seniors, the 32 pocket suites are a pilot project for single individuals, typically

men, who currently have few options other than rooming and boarding houses. The non-profit developer, S.A.M. (Properties) Inc., has secured rent subsidies for half the units. The remainder will rent for \$350 per month.

"We built them about as cheaply as you can build them. The architectural excesses are minimal," observes the architect, Steve Cohlmeier of Winnipeg-based Cohlmeier Architects Limited. "The costs were just a bit too high to support welfare level rents, but low enough for the working poor." Tenants moved into the first completed project on September 1, with the other three expected to be ready for occupation by the end of October.

The \$1.6-million construction costs have been partly funded through the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI), a three-way federal, provincial, municipal partnership launched in 2000 to serve as a single-window resource for non-profit housing providers. The federal and Manitoba governments jointly contributed nearly \$1 million toward the project, while the City of Winnipeg sold the land to the developer for \$1.



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development briefs

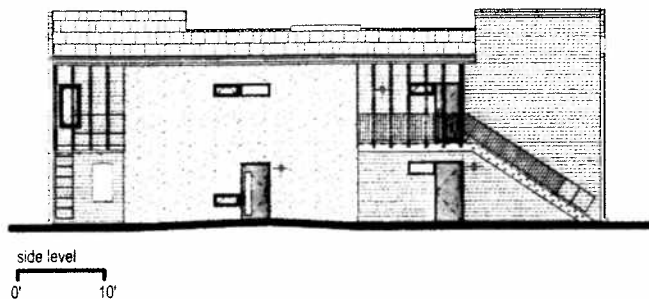
"A lot of the vacant lots the City has are very narrow and aren't necessarily suitable for a single family home. So we were able to help the City, too, by fixing up some of these lots that were very difficult to find a developer for," notes Laurie Socha, S.A.M. Inc.'s General Manager.

The pocket suite developments are inner-city infill projects that complement their surroundings. "The scale of the building is about the size of the neighbouring turn-of-the-century houses," Cohlmeier says.

The architect reworked an earlier design concept, which positioned some of the units half below grade and placed doorways and the stairs to the upper units at the front of the complex. Instead, the doorways are at the side so that windows face the street, and an exterior staircase on each side of the building leads to the second-storey units. "He took the units and slid them together like a little puzzle," Socha says.

Past attempts to develop micro suites in some other Canadian cities have been stymied by municipal property standards by-laws that establish higher standards

Courtesy of Cohlmeier Architects



The 8-unit complex fits onto a 24-foot infill lot. The City of Winnipeg sold the land to the developer for \$1.

for the minimum amount of floor space in dwelling units. This hasn't been the case in Winnipeg. "The only issue we had with zoning was trying to do fire escapes and side yards," Socha recounts.

The units are definitely compact. "Usually we are building hotel rooms at 300 to 450 square feet," Cohlmeier notes, as a comparison.

Although slightly larger in total square footage, the wheelchair accessible suites actually have less living space than the 210-square-foot apartments because more floor area is required in the bathroom. Still, it's seen as a vast improvement to rooming/boarder house living.

S.A.M. Inc. manages 22 other residential buildings in Winnipeg, including co-operatives, family and seniors' rental, life lease, and five Manitoba government housing projects. The non-profit company plans to monitor the pocket suite pilot project over the next year and then possibly build more such developments.

"We're not just going to house people and leave them. We're going to provide home visits once a month or twice a month," Socha adds. "The units are partly furnished also. We supply the pots and pans and beds. The only things tenants have to bring are their own bedding and clothes. We made sure, because we don't have laundry facilities, they are located close to laundromats and grocery stores."

Private market developers have recently built high-rise pocket suite complexes in US cities such as Los Angeles and Las Vegas, where they meet the needs of workers with lower incomes in pricey housing markets. Cohlmeier maintains the same kind of demand exists in Canada, especially in booming centres like Calgary. "I think every city in the country would benefit from doing something like this," he says.

Nevertheless, construction costs per square foot are generally higher than in more conventional residential buildings. "The number of bathrooms and kitchens per square foot is unusually high so you always have that as a reality," Cohlmeier acknowledges.

Market rents in Winnipeg are more affordable than in many Canadian cities, particularly those in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, but average prices are well above the \$350 range. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) annual rental housing market survey reported average rents of \$539 for one-bedroom units and \$683 for two-bedroom units in Winnipeg in October 2005. The average vacancy rate was 1.7%. ■



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