

New project in Kensington Market to house most vulnerable Torontonians

Community Dec 13, 2017 by [Justin Skinner](#) City Centre Mirror



St. Clare's operations manager Andrea Adams, left, and physical assets manager Mohammad Anvari stand outside 25 Leonard Ave., where excavation has begun for a three-storey building that will provide purpose-built rentals for homeless people. - RESCON/Photo

A new partnership will see 22 housing units built in Kensington Market, and the parties involved hope the model used will serve a springboard for more projects of its ilk in the future.

The project will see RESCON, a nonprofit that represents a group of residential home builders, teaming up with St. Clare's Multifaith Housing Society to build the units, which will house some of Toronto's most vulnerable residents. The new units will be built on a parcel of land at 25 Leonard Ave. and will be connected to existing deeply affordable housing units in a converted medical building.

That housing project has been welcomed by residents in Kensington Market, noted St. Clare's operations manager Andrea Adams.

"When St. Clare's first repurposed what was a medical building into housing, there were some concerns," she acknowledged. "But we've been good neighbours over the past 15 years and Kensington has a history of being a welcoming community. This time around, the neighbours were instrumental in getting this building approved."

The housing units will provide shelter for the homeless and chronically underhoused through housing allowances.

“These are for people who don’t have landlord references, who have no credit rating and have low income,” Adams said.

She added that St. Clare’s will work with residents and local service providers to ensure those living in the units have additional support to help them meet other needs, such as employment assistance and counselling.

“There’s a focus on affordable housing in the city, but what’s really being forgotten are the most vulnerable among us,” she said. “A lot of our residents have been through trauma and many have addiction and mental health issues as a result of that trauma.

“The least we can do is help them out with a home so they can work on the other elements they need to be healthy.”

RESCON donated \$1 million to the project and also provided support as St. Clare’s brought the project through the planning process. RESCON president Richard Lyall said his organization was impressed by the work done by St. Clare’s through their existing building in Kensington Market and on a couple of other sites in the city.

“The City of Toronto has its own cash-related issues, so it’s up to everyone to step up,” he said. “There should really be more projects like this.”

Lyall noted that 22 units are a drop in the bucket compared to the need for deeply affordable housing units, but said “maybe those 22 units will save 22 lives.”

Beyond that, St. Clare’s hopes the small units (220 square feet apiece) serve as a model for other, similar projects, with the simple design proving to be scalable and replicable in other neighbourhoods.

Ward 20 Coun. Joe Cressy (Trinity-Spadina) offered enthusiastic support for the project.

“We have a housing crisis in our city, and the new affordable homes at 25 Leonard Ave. are a crucial and welcome addition to our community,” he said.

Construction is expected to begin in the spring, with the site being move-in ready by December of 2018.