

New affordable housing project opens in Toronto's Kensington Market

22-unit building was purposely built to support people experiencing homelessness

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A former parking lot at 25 Leonard Ave. has been redeveloped into a three-storey, 22-unit rental building purposely built to support people experiencing homelessness. - City of Toronto photo

A tiny strip of land previous used as a parking lot in Kensington Market has been redeveloped into affordable housing for some of Toronto's most vulnerable residents.

Owned and operated by St. Clare's Multifaith Housing Society, the 22-unit rental building was purposely built to support people experiencing homelessness.

This morning, local politicians and members of the construction industry joined staff from St. Clare's to celebrate the grand opening of the \$5.4 million affordable housing project, which is located next door to a 77-unit affordable housing building also owned/managed by the same charitable organization.



The unique three-storey building, which has shared laundry facilities and other programming space, features laser-cut, steel railing panels created based on art from local artists Margaux Smith and Leo Krukowski. This installation aims to reflect the community and also signifies the strong connection it has with the tenants of the existing affordable housing building next door and their desire to welcome their new neighbours.

Through rent supplements provided by the City, tenants of 25 Leonard Ave. will be able to rent their units for about half of the average market rate; roughly \$524 per month.

“Providing, stable supportive housing to those experiencing chronic homelessness is just the right thing to do. It's been a pleasure to work alongside St. Clare's and to see the development of these 22 new units,” local Coun. Mike Layton said in a July 10 news release, adding he'd “continue to work alongside neighbours in Kensington Market to build more affordable housing, and to protect the affordable units that exist.”

Board of Health Chair Joe Cressy, who was the area's former municipal rep, said the 25 Leonard Ave. project has been important to him from the very beginning.

“I am so happy to have been able to support the creation of these new affordable housing units and to know that there will soon be 22 new tenants living in a safe, supportive and affordable home,” the Ward 10, Spadina-Fort York councillor said in a release.

“The COVID-19 crisis has shown just how critical access to affordable housing is to our health – you can't follow public health advice to stay home if you don't have one. ... I know that projects like 25 Leonard will help improve the health of individuals experiencing homeless and the community as a whole.”

Deputy Mayor Ana Bailão, who serves as the chair of the city's Planning and Housing Committee, said the project would change the lives of 22 people by giving them safe and permanent homes.

“(It) is one of many examples across the City where we are welcoming new neighbours as we collectively realize the right to housing for all residents,” the Ward 9, Davenport councillor said in a release.

“We're moving forward on our commitment to ensure that Toronto is a place where families and individuals can live in safe, well-maintained and affordable housing.”

The construction of these 22 new studios apartment units was made possible through a \$1 million fundraising effort by the Residential Construction Council of Ontario along with a \$500,000 capital grant from the City of Toronto, which also waived fees and provided property tax exemptions. The City also provided a \$150,000 development grant. St. Clare's came up with \$3.8 million in equity and mortgage financing to complete the project.

“The project highlights the capacity of the non-profit sector to contribute to housing supply and affordability, but would not have been possible without the support of the City, RESCON and private sector donors, and our wonderful Kensington Market neighbours. We hope this sets the stage for future collaborations,” said Andrea Adams, St. Clare's executive director, in a release.

“Homelessness is a solvable problem, and we can do this together. We are relieved that our construction team was able to get the structure finished in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a time when it is particularly clear just how important housing is.”

Toronto Mayor John Tory agreed.

“The success of this project demonstrates what can be achieved when we come together to address housing in our city. Housing is vitally important, but we can’t do it alone, which is why the HousingTO Action Plan commits to implementation through partnerships and collaboration – exactly as what we see here with St. Clare’s, RESCON and the City of Toronto,” he said in a release.

“I want to thank all of our partners for bringing this project to life and for helping us provide stable, affordable housing for vulnerable residents in our city.”