

REGENT PARK

PROJECT DATA

LOCATION

Downtown Toronto, Ontario, Canada

PROJECT STATUS

In phase three out of five as of 2020 (began in 2005 and is expected to be complete around 2030)

PROJECT TYPE

Mixed-income housing redevelopment

SITE SIZE

69 acres (28 ha)

PROJECT SIZE

2,083 rent-g geared-to-income (RGI) units (subsidized to cost 30 percent of a tenant's gross monthly income); 397 new affordable units; 5,400 new market-rate condo units

PROJECT COST

CS\$1 billion (estimated) or about US\$750 million

DEVELOPERS

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the Daniels Corporation, and other partners

DESIGN TEAM

Various

FINANCING

City of Toronto, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), Government of Ontario, Federal Government of Canada

MENTAL HEALTH FEATURES

Park, services like the FOCUS mental health team (based out of a health clinic inside a condominium), youth mental health programs, and drop-in programs

PHYSICAL HEALTH FEATURES

Park, healthy retail, athletic grounds, health-focused programs, aquatic center, community center, health care services, and LEED-certified buildings

An aerial view of Regent Park.
Photo by the Daniels Corporation.



The aquatic center at Regent Park. Photo by the Daniels Corporation.

INTRODUCTION

Originally built in 1948, Regent Park is undergoing a decades-long redevelopment from low-income public housing to a mixed-income neighborhood with a focus on community health, economic development, and relocation supports.

The impetus for redevelopment began 25 years ago, stemming both from residents who demanded neighborhood improvements and from the foresight of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), which also recognized the growing need for significant repairs. TCHC is leading the transformation—expected to be complete around 2030—and has prioritized health-promoting features such as parks, athletic grounds, a community center, and the area’s first supermarket. TCHC has also ensured that all original residents have the right to return to Regent Park and that they will be rehoused in an appropriate replacement unit.



CONTEXT FOR DEVELOPMENT

In 1995, tenants approached the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) about revitalizing Regent Park, then a public housing complex. The original Regent Park was developed to be largely self-contained, which isolated the community from the rest of Toronto and resulted in rising levels of poverty and crime. Over the next 10 years, the community, TCHC, and the city together created a new, shared vision for Regent Park. Following a thorough request for proposals (RFP) process, the Daniels Corporation joined the project in 2006 as TCHC’s development partner. With the overall planning framework in place, the Daniels Corporation began to implement this vision.

Plans focused on reintegrating Regent Park with the rest of the city, promoting economic development, and boosting quality of life through improved health and safety. By restoring the street grid and enhancing walkability, Regent Park has already become more accessible, attracting retail uses with healthy food options and new residents for the market-rate condominiums.

Remo Agostino, vice president of development at the Daniels Corporation, sees these healthy features as the cornerstone of the community. “The park(s), the number of daycares, and the spaces for social services agencies create a neighborhood,” he remarked. “Building a vibrant neighborhood, with the needed community infrastructure, improves the livability and marketability of the community.”

All original residents have a contractual right to return to Regent Park, and currently 913 of the 1,359 relocated households have rejoined the community. Some residents were able to relocate within Regent Park during construction (leading up to this phase, vacancies were not leased back out so that current residents could stay there), while other residents moved within the broader Downtown East area or other parts of the city. Although some former tenants decided to leave public housing, everyone who returned was guaranteed a replacement unit that accommodated their family size. Moreover, TCHC also provided new space to agencies that had been operating in the original buildings at below market cost.



A rendering of water features at Regent Park.
Photo by the Daniels Corporation.

The market-rate apartments are also selling quickly. In fact, the first market-rate condo building sold 85 percent of its units within three weeks. Now, the market-rate units and affordable units, which do not have any visible differences, are together helping to create a mixed-income neighborhood.

Although the redevelopment's completion is expected around 2030, Regent Park has already won the 2010 Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Sustainable Communities Award and the Toronto Urban Design Award of Excellence, among other prizes. More important, it has provided residents with access to healthy food, open space, community services, exercise facilities, and workforce development opportunities while preserving housing for low-income tenants.



A rendering of new buildings and green space at Regent Park.
Photo by the Daniels Corporation.



HEALTH-PROMOTING FEATURES

Features in Regent Park to promote physical, mental, and community health include the following:

- ▶ **Park.** The six-acre (2.4 ha) central park now includes a splash pad, a bake oven, a playground, a greenhouse, a community garden, and green space. Skating rinks are nearby.
- ▶ **Healthy retail.** The new retail promotes economic development and provides necessary resources for health, such as a supermarket and pharmacy.
- ▶ **Athletic grounds.** The facilities include a hockey rink, a basketball court, a soccer field that doubles as a cricket pitch, and a running track.
- ▶ **Health-focused programs.** The Regent Park Community Centre and other local organizations host cooking classes, exercise classes, and other health-related programs.
- ▶ **Aquatic Centre.** This city of Toronto-run facility has swimming classes, three types of pools, and different swim times for diverse populations, including women and the transgender community.
- ▶ **Regent Park Community Centre.** The city-run community center has a gym, a fitness center, a running track, an indoor climbing wall, meeting room spaces, and an office of the Toronto Employment Service.
- ▶ **Sustainable features.** Several buildings, such as Daniels Spectrum (the community's arts and cultural center), are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified.
- ▶ **Health care services.** New services—namely, a birth center, a dental office, and social service agencies—are easily accessible from the new housing. Toronto Community Housing also provided new spaces to agencies that were operating in old buildings.
- ▶ **Mental health programming.** This includes a mental health program through Regent Park Community Health Centre, an ongoing program to support youth via the SEEN Collaborative, and the SkyLark drop-in program run by MLSE LaunchPad. Many of these programs take place within Regent Park and its housing, such as COTA Health's mental health support program out of 220 Oak Street. Additional youth mental health support and referrals come from Yonge Street Mission and Pathways to Education, respectively.



HEALTH OUTCOMES

While only at the halfway point of the project as of 2020, Regent Park's redevelopment has already shown promising signs of enhancing residents' health.

A study from McMaster University has demonstrated tenants' increased feelings of safety in Regent Park (95 percent felt very or somewhat safe, up from 73 percent), slightly lower levels of mild depression, and higher satisfaction with the neighborhood (81 percent versus 59 percent). They note that additional changes in mental or physical health may emerge over time.

TCHC is working to ensure that health programming is relevant for all members of the community. For example, the Aquatic Centre offers a swimming time for women when the windows are covered and Muslim women can exercise in a culturally appropriate setting.

Moreover, the retail spaces are being mindfully curated for health. One site turned down a McDonald's in favor of Paintbox Bistro, a healthier option that is also training and employing people from the community.

Of course, work remains to be done. Some of the original tenants have not returned to Regent Park, and others were relocated to inconvenient neighborhoods that disrupted their social networks. Among those who have returned, some residents have experienced barriers to using the new facilities and programs, such as not having the language skills to sign up for swim classes.

As part of the ongoing revitalization of the neighborhood, the Social Development Plan, which complements the master plan, focuses on four pillars—safety, community building, employment and economic development, and communications—to achieve social cohesion and social inclusion in the community. With 10 years of redevelopment left, Regent Park and its residents are continuing to work toward better health and greater inclusivity.



*A rendering of people spending time on the green space at Regent Park.
Photo by the Daniels Corporation.*