

onthemap



The 80-unit development by Katalyst Real Estate will be erected around a heritage building that was once the White House Hotel, established in the 1880s. PHOTO COURTESY OF KATALYST REAL ESTATE CORP

MATTHEW HAGUE

Filling a void on The Danforth

A NEW NINE-STOUREY RENTALS-ONLY MID-RISE IS LOW-FRILLS, AND SORELY NEEDED

The Danforth is one of Toronto's most iconic avenues. But while its west end is lined with boutiques, yoga studios, organic grocers and trendy coffee shops, and surrounded by homes in the million-dollar range, the most easterly end of the strip, near Victoria Park, is another story.

"It seems like a forgotten corner of the city," says Lijoy Ulahannan, a senior manager at Katalyst Real Estate Corp, a boutique Toronto development firm. "Which doesn't necessarily make sense. It's on major transit — both a subway stop and the GO line. Yet it's been overlooked for years by buyers and developers."

Kunal Adhikari, Katalyst's founder and CEO, lives nearby and has seen the potential. When three lots came available a few years ago — a tumbledown furniture store spanning two storefronts plus a small clothing shop at Danforth and Dawes — he snapped them up. His intention was never to rip down the existing structures and put up the largest condo possible. Part of the furniture store, which was once the White House Hotel, an inn established in the 1880s, is

being restored and incorporated into the façade. And it won't be a condo at all.

Instead, Katalyst is building something the neighbourhood, and the city at large, needs: a modest, mid-rise purpose-built rental building called Pine Apartments at 2720 Danforth. There will be no marble lobby or GoodLife-sized gym on-site. Though there will be a large common terrace and balconies big enough for dining tables on many of the 80-odd units, which will range from studios to three-bedrooms. The Pine will also have an unobtrusive presence. The proposed cladding is black brick, and the volume of the nine-storey building will step back from the Danforth, appearing more slight as it gets taller.

Among the reasons mid-rise, purpose-built rentals are scarce is that much of the city is zoned for low-rise, single-family homes. However, the city has re-evaluated the Danforth because of its proximity to transit, allowing Katalyst to build The Pine without a major rezoning battle.

A more serious deterrent for companies such as Katalyst is the economics of such a small project. "Tall towers downtown can earn higher returns," says Adhikari.

"You have to be very mindful of efficiencies to do mid-rise," adds Ivan Rodriguez, Katalyst's director of development and construction. "You have to be very careful with the timeline of the project."

The longer it drags out, the more expensive it gets.

Katalyst is still in the design phase but hopes to start construction within a year. In order to expedite the process, the company is testing what's called an Integrated Project Delivery, or IPD.

"IPD is more common in Western Canada and other parts of the world," says Rodriguez. "It isn't yet common in Toronto." The idea is that Katalyst brings all the consultants and stakeholders — finance, architecture, development, heritage consultants, planning — together at once. The full team gathers — or Zooms — to hash out the major decisions at once, removing the typical silos that exist between the various parties.

If anything is deemed too expensive or too complex, it's chopped on the spot.

"It's not necessarily easier," says Rodriguez, noting the higher levels of cooperation and trust required. But "it can be more innovative result in a better project."

There's an added financial incentive for the teams to get along and keep things moving forward. "In IPD, we enter into an umbrella agreement, where the focus is all about integration and collaboration," says Jonathan King, whose architecture firm, BNKC, is designing The Pine. "We all have a common risk pool and agree to share in a profit target."

One group not in on the Zoom calls are prospective tenants, many of whom will likely come from the surrounding area. Katalyst is consulting the community separately. But Rodriguez

THREE THINGS

1. Arya Bakery sells staples such as pound cake and croissants, but the real treat is the Turkish and Persian fare, including baklava and many types of flatbread. 2622 Danforth Ave.

2. Simms Restaurant serves Jamaican classics like jerk chicken and oxtail along with breakfast items such as peanut porridge, great with a side of fried plantain. 2754 Danforth Ave.

3. At the City-owned Dentonia Park, which has an 18-hole golf course and a tennis club, greens fees run in the \$30 range — a steal compared to private clubs. 781 Victoria

doesn't expect neighbourhood backlash to slow the project. "As we revitalize the property, we are about to start our community consultation process, and are open to feedback about what people want and need," he says. "We are trying to be efficient here. But we're also trying to ensure we have a good product, a place people want to live."

Rental pricing to be announced. For more information, visit katalyst.ca.

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