

+ 15 STORIES

Claire Kurtin, June 2014

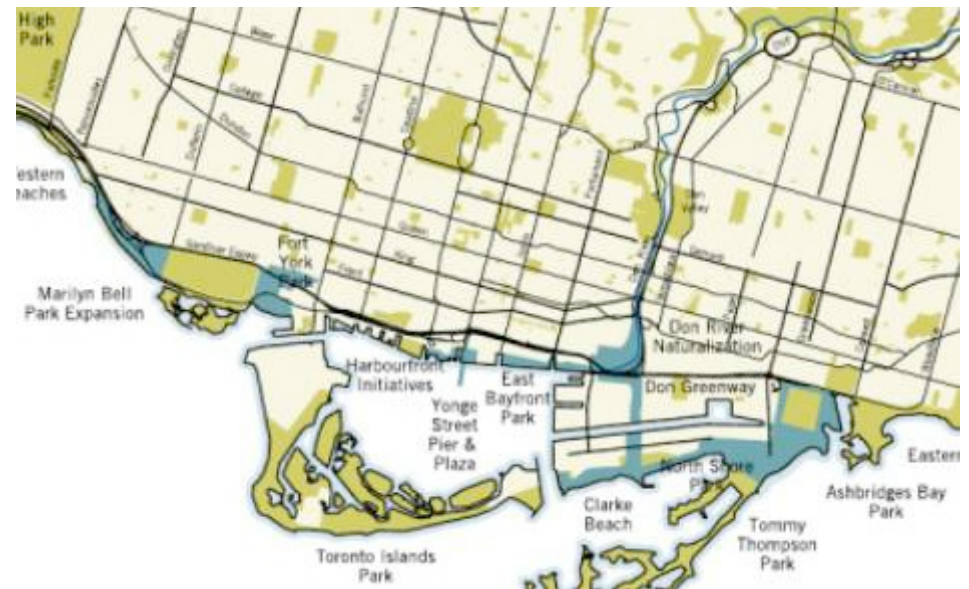
As someone who has grown up in downtown Toronto, this city is very close to my heart. One notable urban issue, which has become predominate in the last ten years, is the increasing number of condominium projects in Toronto's downtown core. This rapid increase in density, while overall, a positive change, has brought with it a few notable problems: a lack of supporting infrastructure and a lack of diversity. While new condos in Toronto are currently in high demand, most of them are built to appeal to a user who is young and single, creating an almost ghetto like condition. Most do not provide for key infrastructural elements such as grocery stores, banks and restaurants, and large areas of Toronto, especially the waterfront, have been built up almost entirely in this way. +15 Stories aims to counteract these effects by working with the existing condo infrastructure and building a cultural district in the air.

Toronto's waterfront has a long and tumultuous history. The Toronto Harbour was first used seen as a strategic military defence post, with the construction of Fort York in 1793, at the foot of what is now Bathurst Street. Since then, Toronto's waterfront has been treated



Initial proposal for the Gardiner Expressway

primarily as an industrial port, with various factories and industrial uses springing up along the shoreline. In the 1940's and 50's, the Gardiner Expressway was built, effectively severing the waterfront from the rest of the downtown core. The Gardiner Expressway was designed to connect the Queen Elizabeth Way through the downtown core, providing convenient access for commuters, and freeing up traffic on the 401. Since the decline of Toronto's industrial economy, urban real estate has been at a premium. In the 1990's, empty space along Toronto's waterfront was quickly beginning to be developed into a new residential area. This condo-boom, which continues to this day along the waterfront, included mostly the construction of cheap, high-rise towers, constructed for street appeal, rather than long-term durability or community growth. In a way, these condominiums served as a further barrier to the accessibility of Toronto's harbour by creating cold, unwelcoming streetscapes, with no diversity, places of destination or street life, "from early land filling for marine shipping facilities to scattered residential development projects in



New Waterfront Toronto green-space initiatives and developments



Proposal for the initial site of the +15 Stories Network

the 1970s, years of ad hoc planning have resulted in a waterfront lacking a coherent look and feel, and one with limited access to the water's edge" (Planning the Central Waterfront, Waterfront Toronto).

Since this condo-boom, the City of Toronto has been developing design schemes to improve the city's waterfront, the City of Toronto has a "multi-billion dollar long-term plan for environmental improvements, economic activity and overall enhancement of quality of life through development of a designated waterfront area" (Waterfront Renewal, City of Toronto). Some of these projects include the new Pan-Am Games Village, set to open in 2015, the new George Brown Waterfront Campus,

and various parks and streetscape improvement initiatives. +15 Stories aims to insert itself into these new developments, by adding another layer of architectural and programmatic interest that interacts with the existing infrastructure at a different scale and height, diversifying the architectural typology of the neighbourhood.

+15 Stories aims to revitalize the Fort York – Bathurst neighbourhood of Toronto by creating a new cultural hub within the city. The initial site is located at the foot of Bathurst Street wedged in between Toronto's historic Fort York and Lake Ontario. A large urban thoroughfare runs through the site, the notorious Gardiner Expressway,

cutting off immediate access to the Lake. Currently, the site is mainly residential, composed of an increasing density of large condominium buildings, with limited other infrastructure or attractions. To the west lies Ontario Place and the CNE, a seasonal fair ground, while to the east, Toronto's financial district and the Air Canada Centre, a large sporting venue. The Toronto real-estate market is already oversaturated with condominiums, and without an urban reinvention, this area risks becoming the next urban slum, as it already carries many of the hallmarks of nearby St. James town: primarily small units with a lack of infrastructure, public transportation and schools. Jane Jacobs writes that "wherever we find a city district with an exuberant variety and plenty in its commerce, we are apt to find that it contains a good many other kinds of diversity also, including a variety of cultural opportunities, variety of scenes, and a great variety in its population and other uses" (The Death and Life of Great American Cities, 148). The +15 Stories Network aims to achieve this.

The +15 Stories network would compose a series of bridges between existing condo towers filled with various cultural attractions and destinations. The bridges would be accessed through existing condo infrastructure and would use a structurally isolated tensile system to support themselves. In order to promote street life in the area, the bridges would be "zoned" to exclude retail, and smaller support hubs would be integrated with existing infrastructure at ground level to cater to increased traffic flow in the area. This new cultural web would attract visitors to the area both through its architecture and its attractions – which might vary from independent galleries to a bird sanctuary to a theatre to a children's playground. By creating cultural diversity and providing for retail opportunities at ground level, +15 Stories aims to reinvigorate the new neighbourhood and provide a catalyst for further condominium developments around Toronto.

The network would be constructed over time and contracted to different architects to create variety in the neighbourhood. As more condos are built, they too would be able to connect to the network,

creating a dramatic addition to Toronto's skyline. As more uses and functions are integrated into the network, and more retail and infrastructural hubs are built, +15 Stories becomes a more complete web, thriving off the growth of Toronto's condos.

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