

# NOVÆ RES URBIS TORONTO

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■ PROPOSED PAPE STATION TOC WOULD BRING HOUSING, NEW PUBLIC REALM FEATURES TO DANFORTH

## ORIENTING COMMUNITIES AROUND TRANSIT

**Matt Durnan**

A mixed-use transit-oriented development proposed for the Danforth would demolish a number of low-rise commercial buildings and single-detached residences around Pape subway station to bring significant housing density to the area as part of **Infrastructure**

Ontario's transit-oriented communities initiative. While the proposed community near Pape Station—one of more

than a dozen transit-oriented communities included as part of Province's plans to build new sustainable transit—will bring

much-needed housing to the area, some stakeholders are not impressed. Some believe

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Concept rendering at grade of Infrastructure Ontario's proposed transit-oriented community near Pape Station on Danforth Avenue. Infrastructure Ontario is proposing to redevelop the site as part of its transit-oriented communities initiative in anticipation of the completion of the new Ontario Line subway line. This proposal would make significant public realm improvements along Danforth Avenue, with a more pedestrian-friendly frontage that would include new retail space at grade within the proposed new buildings.

SOURCE: INFRASTRUCTURE ONTARIO



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the Ontario government may be taking too cautious an approach to aspects of some of its sites, including by neglecting to establish a zoning by-law requiring the provision of affordable housing on them.

Infrastructure Ontario submitted a development concept to the **City of Toronto** for the Pape Station transit-oriented community (TOC) on October 19, 2023 and recently held a community engagement open house for the proposed development on April 2 of this year. The Province's

development concept proposes to bring one 29-storey and two seven-storey mixed-use buildings to the area near Pape Station on the Danforth.

The Pape TOC site is actually a 'split site' that is bisected by Pape Station and a surface parking lot that comprises an assembly of 32 properties on the south site (the larger of the two) from 670-710 Danforth Avenue, 2-16 Eaton Avenue and 1-21 Lipton Avenue, while the north site is composed of an assembly of three residential properties at 11-15 Gertrude Place.

The 29-storey building and one of the two seven-storey buildings would be located on the south site, connected by a pedestrian bridge, while the north site would accommodate

the second seven-storey building. The two sites would be connected by a new north-south street. The three buildings proposed for the Pape TOC would add a total of 439 new residential units to the neighbourhood.

"The transit-oriented community proposal at the future Pape Station would provide more housing, including affordable housing, jobs, retail space for businesses, with convenient access to transit, including connections to subway service along the Ontario Line and Line 2 [TTC] Bloor-Danforth, as well as the local bus network," Infrastructure Ontario (IO) media relations manager **Ian McConachie** told *NRU*.

As part of the Province's new Ontario Line—a 15-kilometre subway line that will run from Exhibition Place through downtown Toronto—**MetroInx** is building a new underground station at Pape Station that will connect to the TTC's existing

Bloor-Danforth Line.

Access to the new underground station would be integrated into the new TOC development, through the 29-storey building on the south site, with additional access from both Danforth Avenue to the south, and from Lipton Avenue to the north.

With additional higher-order transit being planned for the neighbourhood, the Province is seeking to bring more housing density to the immediate area, while enlivening the public realm with streetscape improvements including retail and transit entrances along Danforth, in an effort to create a more vibrant and active pedestrian network.

While the proposed Pape TOC development aligns with both provincial and municipal planning policies that encourage growth and intensification close to transit, some industry stakeholders feel that Infrastructure Ontario may be aiming too low when it comes to its proposal for the Pape Station site.

"Out of all of the Infrastructure Ontario proposals, this is one of the sites with the best transit connections, because it's on two lines [Ontario Line and Bloor-Danforth], however, the height of the buildings is one of the lowest of all of their proposals,"

**More Transit Southern Ontario** (MTSO) director **Haadhi Faizal** told *NRU*.

More Transit Southern Ontario is a volunteer-based

Aerial image showing the location of the sites at 670-710 Danforth Avenue, 2-16 Eaton Avenue and 1-21 Lipton Avenue that Infrastructure Ontario is proposing to redevelop as a transit-oriented community. The site labelled 'A' is a land assembly composed of 32 low-rise mixed-use properties on the south side (of the Pape Station TOC site). The site labelled 'B', north of the existing Pape Station consists of an assembly of three residential properties. Pape Station sits roughly between the two sites (large white building). Infrastructure Ontario is proposing to develop one 29-storey building and one seven-storey building on site A and one seven-storey building on site B. The three new mixed-use buildings adjacent to Pape subway would contain a total of 439 new residential units, including affordable housing units, and retail space at grade. A new underground Ontario Line transit station would be integrated into site A.

SOURCE: INFRASTRUCTURE ONTARIO



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organization that advocates for more connected, equitable, affordable, frequent, reliable and safer transit across the GTHA and surrounding regions.

“You compare this [Pape Station TOC site] to the Cosburn site [Infrastructure Ontario TOC site] just one kilometre north, and it [Cosburn] has two 29-storey buildings, compared to just one at this site. At Thorncliffe Park [Infrastructure Ontario TOC site], there’s multiple 57-storey buildings proposed. What we’d like to see at the Pape site is multiple 50- to 60-storey buildings to maximize the housing in this area. If Thorncliffe Park with just one station justifies [57 storeys],

then this site with two subway lines should justify that sort of density,” Faizal said.

In addition to a number of IO’s other TOC sites accommodating more height and density than what is being proposed for the Pape Station site, there is an active application right next door to the Infrastructure Ontario site at 654-656 and 658-668 Danforth Avenue, where **Del Boca Vista Properties** is proposing to develop a 49-storey, 496-unit mixed use building.

“The main reason that they [Infrastructure Ontario] pointed out, and they’re not trying to be secretive about it, is that it [the Pape station TOC] is being proposed at this height to transition to these low-rise neighbourhoods,” said Faizal.

“The thing is, these low-

rise neighbourhoods only exist because over the last 50 years, it’s been artificially kept low-density and zoned for low-density, and the City hasn’t allowed for taller buildings in that spot. Since this location is on a subway line, it should probably have more density.”

The proposed Pape TOC development is located on a site in the Greektown neighbourhood, which is largely characterized by a mix of low-rise retail and restaurants of between two to four storeys in height, with commercial uses at grade and residential uses located above.

While Faizal and More Transit Southern Ontario are advocating for more height and density on the Pape TOC site, **Smart Density** architect and urban designer **Naama Blonder** says the “fight over height” can be a needless one, and the planning focus for these transit-oriented communities should be aimed more at achieving quality over quantity.

“We should be focusing

on quality over things like building heights. I think that if you’re right on a subway line, there shouldn’t be a height and density limit, but there could be quality requirements. For example, what we tried to do with inclusionary zoning was say ‘10 per cent of the units need to be affordable’, but no one was willing to give more height or give up on any other guidelines,” Blonder told *NRU*.

Infrastructure Ontario has indicated that the Pape Station TOC will include affordable housing, though there is no indication as of yet of what percentage of the units will be designated as affordable.

In the fall of 2022, the Province stated its intentions to introduce changes to inclusionary zoning policies through Bill 23: *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*, which included direction to update regulations pertaining to the level of affordability, number of affordable units, and period of affordability that would be required for new developments

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Concept rendering of Infrastructure Ontario’s proposed mixed-use transit-oriented development at Pape Station on Danforth Avenue. Infrastructure Ontario is proposing to develop one 29-storey and one seven-storey mixed-use building on the south portion of the site and one seven-storey mixed-use building on the north side of the site. The transit-oriented community would bring nearly 450 new housing units to the neighbourhood, including affordable housing. The proposal also includes public realm improvements along Danforth Avenue and a new underground transit station that will serve the TTC’s Bloor-Danforth subway line and the new Ontario Line.

SOURCE: INFRASTRUCTURE ONTARIO



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subject to inclusionary zoning policies.

Legislation implementing these changes is not yet in force, and while the proposed TOC development falls within the Pape Station protected major transit station area (PMTSA), that delineation is still under review by the Minister of **Municipal Affairs and Housing**.

In other words, while Infrastructure Ontario is promising affordable housing as part of the Pape Station TOC development, the City of Toronto has no authority to impose inclusionary zoning policies requiring a benchmark for a specified number of affordable units, level of affordability or affordability period.

This stands out as a key point of concern for Ward 14 Toronto-Danforth councillor **Paula Fletcher**, who says that despite what Infrastructure Ontario is pitching for the project, there's nothing to indicate this proposal will include affordable housing.

"There is not one brick, window or piece of drywall devoted to affordable housing in their [IO's] plan. They [Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing] have never approved inclusionary zoning. Forget our inclusionary zoning,

this government should have a goal of a certain percentage of affordable housing on every pre-zoned TOC," Fletcher told *NRU*.

"This is the provincial government zoning lands that Metrolinx has bought. IO is zoning it, then they're going to sell it. If you don't sell it with a requirement for affordable housing, then it's just a fairy tale. When we have a zoning by-law, that stipulates very clearly how many affordable housing units there will be. That's nowhere in any of the rezoning proposals that Infrastructure Ontario has. This is not a City of Toronto project, it's a provincial project, and one would think that off the bat, there's a good mix with a good percentage of affordable housing at a transit site."

Blonder suggests another quality-related element that should be considered for these new Infrastructure Ontario transit-oriented communities is a requirement for zero vehicle parking spaces in them. The Pape Station TOC proposal includes fairly minimal parking, with just 111 vehicle parking spaces proposed within a three-level underground parking garage.

"We're still designing these transit-oriented communities very much for the car. It's

the same basic assumptions that everyone needs parking. Oftentimes, with the Ontario Line, they don't get to design a new network of roads, but when they do, they'll have a street that is 40-metres wide. Why?" Blonder said.

"They have three lanes [of road], streetcar, three lanes. Everyone is so proud that we're designing for the future and sustainability, but then the design is super oversized and everything is for the car. You have this golden opportunity to design something that is really much more pedestrian-friendly. So when I say quality over quantity, what about an amazing public realm? We always see protecting against [building] height as protecting the public, but is fighting over height protecting the public? What about raising the bar on anything that is public-related? Public realm, landscape, let's create something that is much nicer to walk and doesn't prioritize cars."

There are a number of public realm improvements proposed for the Pape Station TOC, including the development of a new "woonerf". Woonerf is a Dutch term for space that is shared between pedestrians, cyclists, and slow-moving vehicles. The Pape Station TOC also proposes enhanced sidewalks with a minimum 2.1-metre clearance for two-way pedestrian traffic on all public streets throughout the TOC site. New street trees, planters, and street furniture are

proposed to improve the area, along with commercial, retail and amenity spaces at grade within the new buildings.

"This proposal includes approximately 2,150 square metres of retail space, which would help support local economic development," said McConachie.

"It also supports the uptake of active transportation, through the provision of more than 480 bicycle parking spots with dedicated spaces reserved for transit users. This proposal also maximizes access to and visibility of the transit station, by strategically locating the station building in a prominent location along Danforth Avenue."

Infrastructure Ontario has not yet submitted a formal development application to the City of Toronto for the Pape Station TOC.

More information on this proposal and on all of the sites included in the Province's TOC project can be found on Infrastructure Ontario's website [here](#). 