

SEEING MULTI-USE IN A NEW LIGHT

Matt Durnan

Once built, a mixed-use mid-rise development proposed for a property in North York has the potential both to lift the “block killer” image typically associated with self-storage facilities and to shift thinking when it comes to the true meaning of a mixed-use development.

At its meeting May 11, **City of Toronto** council approved a zoning by-law amendment application by **Dymon Storage** to permit the development of a 10-storey mixed-used building at 3621 Dufferin Street. The development will accommodate 153 residential units, retail uses, office and self-storage uses, along with 334 vehicle parking spaces and 161 bicycle parking spaces.

The proposed mixed-use residential, retail, office and self-storage building will have a gross floor area of 46,437 square metres and a floor space index of 2.74 to accommodate all of this. Dymon also proposes the development of a new 23-metre wide north-south public street running along the easterly boundary of the site from Billy Bishop Way to Wilson Avenue.

Words like ‘change’ and ‘revolutionize’ were front and centre when City of Toronto

senior planner **Ben DiRaimo** discussed the project with *NRU*, as he believes this proposal brings forth an opportunity to redefine what ‘mixed-use’ really means.

“It’s truly a mixed-use building, it’s going to make mixed-use mean something, because the variety of uses that are involved in this building is quite exciting,” DiRaimo told *NRU*.

“We think it’s going to revolutionize the opportunity to look at multi-use buildings in a new light.”

In Ottawa-based personal storage company Dymon Storage’s mixed-use proposal, a storage facility will be a core use of the building.

While the words ‘self-storage facility’ may for some, conjure up visions of an episode of the

reality television series ‘Storage Wars’ featuring people gathering to bid on the random contents of abandoned storage lockers, the vision associated with Dymon’s facilities is to have them integrated into a mixed-use development to the point where you wouldn’t know a self-storage facility was there.

“This storage area is actually like a building-within-a-building, so you won’t notice it from outside,” said DiRaimo.

“Dymon’s business model isn’t the typical ‘bring your old tires and boxes for the year’ [facility], it’s more of a business support model, and [one] predicated towards being

a business incubator. So, they have additional [amenities] like

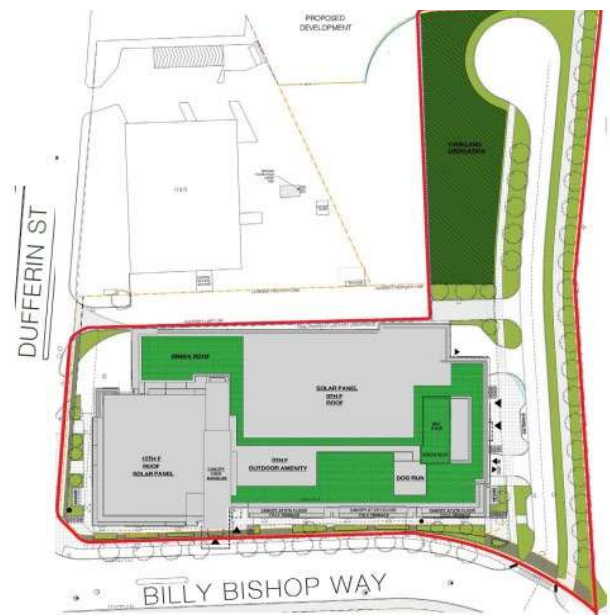
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Below left: Location of a development proposed by Dymon Storage for 3621 Dufferin Street. City of Toronto council approved a zoning by-law amendment this week for Dymon to develop a 10-storey mixed-use development on the site that will accommodate 153 residential units, retail uses, along with office and self-storage uses.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

Below: Concept diagram showing the footprint of Dymon Storage’s proposed 10-storey mixed-use building for 3621 Dufferin Street, showing allocations for solar panels atop the 10th floor roof and atop the 8th floor roof and parkland at the northeast corner of the site.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO



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uses of a concierge, mailboxes, boardrooms and that kind of stuff.”

At first pass, more than four years ago, the city’s planning department had little interest in seeing a self-storage facility integrated into a mixed-use development, but upon closer inspection of the proposal its attitude changed.

“Although we initially said ‘Go away’, we took a different look at it, and we realized that this is actually pretty unique, and it’s within the context of a building that also has other uses,” DiRaimo said.

“I visited their site in Ottawa, and I came back realizing that this was an opportunity to do something different, and that it would also support local business opportunities. Not everybody who has a home business has the opportunity to hold a board meeting, or to have a mailbox that isn’t at their house. Dymon is offering something that is more than just storage; when you add the opportunity for new retail and other local uses, and intertwine it with residential, you have an incredible opportunity to put the meaning of mixed-use on its head.”

The traditional way of thinking when it comes to mixed-use development tends

to trend toward the idea of a tower structure where residential units are built atop at-grade retail businesses like small grocery stores, dry cleaners, coffee shops and medical offices.

This Dufferin Street development could represent a shift in that way of thinking; a shift that has been happening right under many people’s noses.

“I think in people’s mental maps in Toronto, we’ve often thought of mixed uses as an apartment or condos with retail on the main floor; and what we’ve seen in Toronto in the last couple of decades is that there’s been a real expansion in what types of uses can go together – public, private and non-profit,” **University of Toronto** professor of geography and planning **Matti Siemiatycki** told *NRU*.

Siemiatycki is a member

of the U of T School of Cities’ creative mixed-use building initiative leadership team. The initiative looks at how to bring together public and private uses in mixed-use buildings in creative ways that can bring unexpected partners together in the same facility.

Examples of some of these creative mixed-use buildings are the **Toronto Metropolitan University** (formerly Ryerson)/**Loblaws** facility at 50 Carlton Street and the **TIFF Bell Lightbox** Festival Tower at 350 King Street West.

“It’s kind of a phenomenon that’s happening right under our noses without much attention paid to it, and without much celebration of how this creative mixing of uses is leading to a more dynamic city,” said Siemiatycki.

“As our cities intensify and prices skyrocket and every square inch is becoming more valuable, people are trying to find creative solutions for how uses can come together.”

Included in a March 31 City of Toronto planning division report on the proposed

Dufferin Street development is a recommendation that the land owner convey to the city an on-site parkland dedication having a minimum size of 699 square metres, to be located in the north portion of the site, with frontage on the new public right-of-way.

Additionally, planning staff recommended entering into an agreement with Dymon at the time of registration of the subdivision or at the time of condominium registration (whichever is earlier), for the owner to convey to the city an 824-square-metre over-dedication of parkland for a space located in the north portion of the site, to the satisfaction of the general manager of parks, forestry and recreation and the city solicitor.

City council will then be charged with approving the 1,523-square-metre parkland dedication, subject to the owner transferring the parkland to the city free and clear.

The prospect of reinvigorating the Dufferin-Wilson area is an exciting one

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Rendering of the 10-storey mixed-use development proposed by Dymon Storage for 3621 Dufferin Street. The building will accommodate 153 residential units, along with retail, office and self-storage space and will have a gross floor area of 46,437 square metres.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO