

RAISING THE BAR AT TYNDALE GREEN



Marc Mitanis

The development and design team behind a proposed residential community on **Tyndale University's** Bayview campus say their development demonstrates how sensitive and sustainable redevelopment of an inner suburban site can be achieved while simultaneously setting a new bar for the quality of affordable housing that can be delivered in the city.

In June 2021, **Markee Developments** submitted Official Plan and zoning by-law amendment, and draft plan of subdivision applications for the lands at 3377 Bayview Avenue seeking approval to develop a new affordable residential community. Located on the east side of Bayview between Finch Avenue East and Steeles Avenue East, the 22.8-hectare site is currently occupied by the Tyndale University campus, which includes one main building as well as landscaped areas and surface parking lots. Tyndale is a private, Christian university offering programs at the undergraduate, seminary and graduate study levels. Existing university functions

would continue to operate within the new community.

Founded by former **City of Toronto** chief planner **Jennifer Keesmaat** and former **Shiplake**

Properties CEO **Jason Marks**, Markee Developments' mandate—to design, build, and operate affordable housing—is clearly reflected in the proposal

for what Markee and Tyndale University are calling 'Tyndale Green.' The company's first development project envisions a total of 15 new buildings, most ranging between five and eight storeys in height, with three buildings proposed for heights between 12 to 20 storeys. The buildings would accommodate 1,504 residential

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Map showing the site (red outline) of Markee Developments' proposed Tyndale Green community. The 22.8-hectare site at 3377 Bayview Avenue between Steeles Avenue East and Finch Avenue East is primarily occupied by Tyndale University's Bayview campus. The eastern half of the site contains natural areas and part of German Mills Creek, a tributary of the Don River.

SOURCE: BOUSFIELDS INC.

Landscape plan showing the location of existing and new buildings proposed under Markee Developments' Tyndale Green development project. The site currently accommodates one main building and associated facilities serving Tyndale University, in addition to landscaped areas and surface parking lots. Tyndale University and Markee Developments are proposing to redevelop the site to accommodate a new affordable residential community composed of 15 buildings ranging in height from five to 20 storeys.

SOURCE: THE PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

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rental units—half of which would be secured as affordable housing in perpetuity. Markee is also proposing 1,385 square metres of non-residential area for the site, including spaces for a daycare and café. A total of 1,165 parking spaces, including 233 electric vehicle parking spaces, would be located in five underground parking levels, and over 1,500 bicycle parking spaces would be provided.

Markee Developments vice-president **Alex Mather** said the delivery of affordable housing is the founding principle and reason for Markee's existence. Mather hopes that combining high-quality affordable housing with heritage preservation, environmental sustainability, walkability, and livability will set a new bar for the sensitive and sustainable redevelopment of inner suburban Toronto sites.

"We set an early goal for ourselves in wanting to build a community here that anyone—regardless of income level—would be happy and fortunate and proud to live in," Mather told *NRU*. "Part of our vision is about trying to deliver a project that doesn't compromise on any one of a number of really important city-building principles: sustainability, walkability, access to the community, affordability, architectural design, and heritage

preservation. We want to try to have our cake and eat it too, in terms of showing that you can accomplish all those things and deliver a really significant

extent of affordability as well."

The design team for the project includes **KPMB Architects** and **The Planning Partnership**, which is serving as the landscape architect on the project. KPMB Architects' founding partner **Shirley Blumberg** said that KPMB and

Markee are aligned in their approach to city-building, in achieving social equity, and in their concern around housing affordability in Toronto. Blumberg is optimistic that Tyndale Green could serve as a demonstration project for how to add low- and medium-density development to the inner suburbs of Toronto.

"Right now, all that's on offer (pretty well), are single-family homes [in the inner suburbs]," Blumberg told *NRU*. "And that's not very flexible, and not very sustainable. What happens to seniors who live on their own? What happens to single people or young couples who can't afford to buy a three-bedroom, single-family home? There has to be more density

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Rendering showing the proposed Tyndale Green development at 3377 Bayview Avenue. The project would be developed in three phases and would feature 1,504 purpose-built rental units, including 752 affordable units that would remain affordable in perpetuity.

SOURCE: MARKEE DEVELOPMENTS
ARCHITECT: KPMB ARCHITECTS

Rendering showing the proposed Tyndale Green development at 3377 Bayview Avenue. In addition to proposing 752 affordable housing units for the site, the project proposes spaces for a daycare and café.

SOURCE: MARKEE DEVELOPMENTS
ARCHITECT: KPMB ARCHITECTS

Rendering showing the proposed Tyndale Green development at 3377 Bayview Avenue. The proposed development envisions a network of public and private streets, shared streets, and a number of open spaces that would be accessible to the public.

SOURCE: MARKEE DEVELOPMENTS
ARCHITECT: KPMB ARCHITECTS

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and more choice available for people. If you've lived in a neighbourhood all your life, and you retire or you want to sell your family home, why should you have to leave your neighbourhood?"

With Tyndale Green, Blumberg imagines a walkable, connected, and intimate community bisected with trails and woonerfs—'living streets' defined by shared spaces, pedestrian-friendly streetscape design, and traffic calming measures. The proposal also seeks to enhance access to the ravine network associated with German Mills Creek, a tributary of the Don River that snakes through the east end of the property.

"What we envision is mostly low- to medium-height buildings that are either affordable rental or market rental," Blumberg told *NRU*. "And these buildings frame landscaped courtyards, and the idea is we're bringing the ravine sensibility up onto the site. And then, there's a connected system of pedestrian and bike pathways."

The ravine and natural landscape are viewed as defining elements of the site, and Mather said it's important to preserve as much of the existing tree canopy as possible, including an extensive and mature row of trees that serves as a natural buffer between the site and the

single-family neighbourhood to the south. Elements of the built landscape, such as permeable paving treatments and integrated sustainable stormwater infrastructure, like raised planter beds, will act as odes to the principle of ecological restoration, added Mather.

The plan also retains the main Tyndale University building as a central feature on the site. Although the building—which previously functioned as an all-girls, Catholic secondary school—is not listed on the city's Heritage Register, the development proposal calls for its adaptive reuse and improvements to its existing rotunda. Blumberg said the building gives the site a "sense of place" in Toronto's inner suburbs, which tend to be "fairly undifferentiated."

But large properties like the Tyndale University lands represent opportunities to do something unique, and introduce both gentle density and affordable housing in predominantly single-family suburban neighbourhoods.

"It seems to me that both Canada and the United States have vast suburban developments that are unsustainable for so many reasons that everyone understands, and urban living is obviously much more sustainable," Blumberg told *NRU*. "There is a light density,

a kind of gentle density that can be introduced into the suburban context, and I think this could be a great model. We understand and love the challenge of trying to demonstrate how you could do this; make it a beautiful living environment with that level of intimacy and connection to nature, with simple but elegant designs, and make it affordable."

On July 14, city council will consider a recommendation from the planning and housing committee to approve Open Door Program incentives for the project's proposed 752 affordable rental units. The incentives being recommended for council approval include relief from development charges and relief from planning application, building permit, and parkland dedication fees.

Affordable housing advocate and [HousingNowTO.com](https://www.housingnowto.com) technical lead **Mark Richardson** said he's happy to see an entity other than the City of Toronto trying to leverage its land for the delivery of affordable housing.

"We'd love to see other large institutional landowners doing the same thing, be it the school boards or other universities or other levels of government," Richardson told *NRU*. "The federal and provincial governments have lots of land within the city, and we could be doing these kinds of Open Door deals all over the city if everybody comes to the table. Hopefully, having a

former chief planner involved will actually help navigate some of the usual potholes that affordable housing projects fall in."

If approved, the development would be constructed in four phases, with the affordable rental units being equally distributed across all phases. 🌱