



Regent Park's new lawn is a dynamic, flexible space for multiple activities

The Park of the Future

The new park in Regent Park is an ambitious gathering place that covers a sprawling city block. It's the urban dream come to life

First Steps

In the 1990s, a devoted group of Regent Park residents illuminated the need for change. Their “garden city”—the country’s oldest social housing project—had become alienated from the rest of Toronto. Crime was rampant and the architecture had fallen into decay. The residents rallied urban thinkers and leaders to talk about solutions. Over time, and after many obstacles, their efforts led to a galvanizing vision for a new Regent Park.

In 2003, the Regent Park Revitalization was officially launched as one of the most progressive initiatives of its kind in the world. “At its core, the plan is about breaking down the isolation of our residents,” says Greg Spearn, the chief development officer of Toronto Community Housing (TCH). That meant ambitious goals: renewing the neighbourhood, connecting the streets to the downtown grid, creating first-rate amenities and building residences for a diversity of incomes.

In 2006, The Daniels Corporation came on board to take up those challenges as TCH’s development partner within the Regent Park Revitalization. To date, the company has built new housing and an arts and cultural centre, Daniels Spectrum, and the Paintbox Bistro, a café and catering business that

focuses on healthy food and creates employment opportunities for residents. It’s not just about bricks and mortar—Daniels is deeply involved in helping to grow the community’s social infrastructure.

For the community, Daniels, TCH and the city, the next step in the revitalization is an exciting one. It’s the opening of a six-acre park facing Dundas Street East. Covering an entire city block, Regent Park—the park—will open later this year. It will be the centrepiece of the area and a magnet for visitors from far and wide. Here’s the inspiring story of how it came to life.

Shaping the Vision

Revitalizing the 69-acre neighbourhood is an intricate process divided into five distinct phases. At first, the construction of the park fell into phase five. But when the city and its partners reached out to the residents, the park became a phase-two priority.

This was no ordinary public consultation process: the stakeholders of Regent Park enlisted a force of “animators” to get residents out to meetings, brought in a range of translators to help articulate residents’ needs and took inno-

vative approaches like asking the community to create a collage of images that would help form a visual portrait of their park.

The inclusive process yielded real results. One of the measures of Regent Park’s success is in finding ways for people to bond over common interests. When residents spoke about the importance of food, the park’s design changed.

“This park is the multifunctional heart of the community,” says landscape architect Nancy Chater of the Planning Partnership, the firm

“We’re promoting social cohesion with a partnership around food”

executing the vision. Several key initiatives will “knit the park into the community,” as she puts it, within a network of tree-lined streets. The first is urban agriculture: a fruit tree orchard, gardens, a greenhouse and a community bake oven. These facilities will be programmed by the Regent Park Food Partnership, which includes the Christian Resource Centre and Dixon Hall—organizations that provide resources to residents—and Green Thumbs Growing Kids, which introduces urban youth to gardening. “We’re promoting social cohesion with this partnership around food,” says Liz Curran of the Christian Resource Centre. What’s more, the Paintbox Bistro plans to sell or trade with food cooked from produce grown in the park, and there’s the bustling Regent Park Farmers’ Market—a vital tool for community engagement.

The second defining feature of the park is its open green space. Far from being a traditional park with a baseball diamond, Regent Park will have a large, sunken lawn that will act as a flexible space for a variety of activities. There’s also an off-leash dog park—a necessity of urban life in Toronto. For children, there’s a playground featuring unique equipment such as a working mini-train and a water-play plaza next to the new Regent Park Aquatic Centre. Finally, there’s a public art installation featuring portraits of Regent Park residents by Toronto artist Dan Bergeron—it will occupy a plaza on Dundas, which will also act as a performance venue.

“This is the people’s park, so the residents will shape what the park is used for,” says Martin Blake, a vice-president of Daniels who oversees the company’s involvement in the revitalization. For instance, the Regent Park Film Festival may well migrate outdoors and religious festivals may be celebrated on the lawns. The possibilities are endless. As Blake says: “Only time will tell how truly fantastic this new park will be.”



The Green Thumb Movement

Regent Park and Beyond

Urban farming has been embraced in cities as disparate as New York and Madrid. In Toronto, the practice has been pioneered by The Daniels Corporation.

Always thinking outside the box, Daniels actively incorporates urban agriculture opportunities such as container balcony gardening, community garden plots, greenhouses and even farmer’s markets into their new home communities. Urban agriculture invites green thumbs to come together, establish a deeper sense of community and feel connected to the environment. Daniels also provides residents with workshops and seminars, led by Ontario organic farmers, so that they can learn about better techniques to grow their vegetables and herbs.

Incorporating urban agriculture is a natural offshoot of the Daniels motto “Love Where You Live.” It allows for opportunities in education, urban greening and best of all, a coming together of residents of all ages and backgrounds.

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