

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Lana Hall

What would cities look like if we were more creative with mixed uses? That's the question being asked at an installation hosted by the **University of Toronto's School of Cities** and the **Infrastructure Institute**, intended to celebrate—and inspire—creative mixed-use developments across Toronto and beyond.

The exhibition '+ (plus) 2.0: Imagining the future of city-building together through creative mixed-use,' uses crowd-sourced suggestions for unconventional mixed-use buildings and features mock-ups built by School of Cities researchers based on those crowd-sourced suggestions.

The featured designs include a condominium atop a library and transit hub, a housing complex that features public allotment gardens and a food co-op, and an EMS [Emergency Medical Services] station that accommodates affordable housing and community services on other floors of the building. The latter is on the way to becoming a reality as a **CreateTO** project, which will see the creation of rental housing units, community space and new facilities for **Toronto Fire Services** and **Toronto Paramedic Services** at 260 Adelaide Street West.

The exhibit also showcases examples of creative mixed-use projects already in existence, including the Daniels Spectrum building, a cultural hub combined with housing in Regent Park, and the Crombie Park Apartments at 85 Lower Jarvis Street, which incorporate residential units, retail and two schools: **St. Michael Catholic School** and the **Downtown Alternative School**. The installation features projects farther afield as well, such as

the **Calgary Central Library** in Alberta, which is built around the city's Light Rail Transit (LRT) line.

Mixed-use developments are not uncommon in Toronto and many new building projects incorporate some combination of residential uses with retail or commercial space. But University of Toronto geography professor and director of the Infrastructure Institute **Matti Siemiatycki** says there's room for more

creativity when we think about conventional "mixes," and how they might serve their communities.

"The pro forma mixing of uses in Ontario and Canada is ... typically chain retail on the main floor with housing above it. And we can all picture what that is: a drugstore, maybe a small dry cleaner, a coffee shop, maybe a dental clinic on the main floor, with housing up above," he told *NRU*.

"Those are important mixings of uses, but I think what we've seen in our communities is that there's so many more ways of mixing that can deliver social and community value, while still enabling and, in fact, in many

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Above: Photo of the '+ (plus) 2.0' exhibition, hosted by the University of Toronto School of Cities and the Infrastructure Institute. The exhibition aims to imagine new types of mixed-use buildings with high social and community value, while celebrating creative mixed-use projects that already exist in Toronto, and beyond.

SOURCE: SHELBY LEE, SCHOOL OF CITIES

Below: Rendering of the Calgary Central Library in Alberta, which incorporates a light rail transit station. These types of collaborative creative mixed-use projects are a form of creative urban design problem solving, and help projects achieve more than they would with a single project partner.

SOURCE: DIALOG/SNOBHETTA

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cases, enhancing the building that happens up above.”

Siemiatycki says when multiple partners are involved with a mixed-use project, often projects are able to achieve more than they could with a single partner.

“Often times a developer may own a site and for a variety of reasons ... they can’t necessarily make the numbers work on their project,” he says.

“Similarly, we have lands where the public may own the land but doesn’t necessarily have the resources to build [the entire] building itself ... And then there are other cases where a non-profit owns the site and again, they have great intentions, but they can’t necessarily execute the project on their own either. So the mixing of uses is a type of creative problem solving”

That kind of problem solving was necessary when designing the new Calgary Central Library in Alberta, to both serve as a gateway and incorporate the city’s LRT line, says **DIALOG** retired principal architect **Janice Liebe**. Before retiring, Liebe worked on the project along with New-York-based firm, **Snøhetta**, and says the library and transit station mix of uses made perfect sense for the under-utilized piece of land in downtown Calgary.

“That site is where the C Train comes up out of the tunnel on a curve and heads towards grade level tracks throughout downtown Calgary,” she told *NRU*.

“That property was owned by the **City of Calgary**, but who was ever going to build on top of that? It was not going to be a developer with all the associated costs that were going to be taken up by just having to build the enclosure around the rail.”

The building now seamlessly connects downtown Calgary with the East Village, animates the public realm and serves as a hub for both public transit users and the myriad guests of the

busy library branch, says Liebe.

“It was a very satisfying experience working in that environment, where everybody was trying to get the best possible building for the available funds that we had.”

Private and public sector partnerships have also helped solve social or community challenges closer to home, as was the case with 299 Campbell Avenue, a purpose-built rental building in Toronto’s Junction neighbourhood developed by **TAS** that is now also home to the Perth-Dupont Library branch.

“There was sort of a perfect storm of us wanting to put some sort of community space that was really valuable to the neighbourhood, and also the existing library branch that we knew there was interest from the City in improving or relocating,” says **TAS** director of

development, **Georgia Brook**.

The purpose-built rental part of the building opened in 2022, and the Perth-Dupont Library branch, located on the ground floor, is scheduled to open next year. Brook says their intent is to stratify the building, meaning the **Toronto Public Library** will own the 10,000-square-foot library space outright, while **TAS** will retain ownership over the remaining portion of the building.

“I think it’s a big win for the local community, but it’s a win for us, it’s a win for the building,” she says. “We view it as an amenity for the residents that live in the building.”

The ‘+(plus) 2.0: Imagining the future of city-building together through creative mixed-use,’ exhibition runs at the **Collision Gallery** (30 Wellington Street West, Unit G114) until September 27 2023. For more information about the exhibition, please visit the Infrastructure Institute’s website [here](#). 🌱



Rendering of 299 Campbell Avenue in Toronto, a purpose-rental building by **TAS** that will soon be home to the new Perth-Dupont Toronto Public Library branch. The development solved two problems—it created much needed rental housing for city residents and enabled the Toronto Public Library to get a new library space for the aging branch. Source: **TAS**

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