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## Raising the Bar(n)



Torontoist got a sneak peak at the newly redeveloped [Wychwood Barns](#) earlier this week and our verdict can be pithily summarized as "yippee!" A veritable playground for the ecologically and socially conscious, the newest [Artscap](#) endeavour lives up to the [hype](#) and [anticipation](#). The Barns project represents a new and particularly hopeful kind of urban redevelopment, and we can only hope to see many more such ventures breaking ground soon.



The Wychwood Barns is a multi-use facility which houses (deep breath): artist studios, live/work units, social housing units, performance spaces, a greenhouse, a sheltered garden, thirteen non-profit organizations, a sports field, a playground, a [farmers' market](#), a public gallery, and community use space. It is the first heritage redevelopment in Canada to get [LEED gold certification](#), and a host of truly cool environmentally-friendly features have been integrated into the design. Rainwater will be harvested from the roof and sent to an underground cistern; it'll supply the building's non-potable water needs and be used for everything from landscaping to toilets. There is low-flow plumbing and a geo-thermal heating and cooling system, and 75% of waste was diverted from landfill during the construction process.

The Wychwood Barns began life in 1913: opened by the city as a hub for linking the different rail systems then in use, they were soon folded into TTC operations and served as streetcar housing and transit testing facilities. Left vacant by the mid-eighties, it took the combined efforts of three levels of government, the persistent advocacy of [Joe Mihevc](#), participation from the private sector and several non-profits, an inspired collaboration between Artscape and [The Stop](#), and several years of concerted effort to bring the site back to life. It shouldn't have been quite as hard, and shouldn't have taken quite so long: the merits of the project now seem entirely obvious. Despite a few [similarly inclined developments](#) in the city, however, the multi-use model is still relatively new: hard to explain to local residents and hard to classify for potential donors, it can take a bit of extra effort to get this kind of project off the ground.

Joe Lobko described the project as "the healing of a site." It's better than that, in fact, for the Barns not only repurposes empty space but creates a new environment for and model of community interaction. [Jane Jacobs](#) taught us, decades ago, that cities flourish when mixed-use development allows for the happy mingling of people and cross-pollination of ideas. Shrink that model down to a single facility, throw in a serious raft of sustainability measures, add a good dose of historical preservation, and the Wychwood Barns is what you get. Local residents will be able to enjoy idyllic Saturdays, grabbing freshly-baked loaves of bread before heading outside to the playground or the skating rink. Community groups will benefit from the added public interest and new event spaces. And though the development is resolutely non-profit, commercial investment in the area, particularly in the adjacent St. Clair strip, will be spurred by the excitement this project is generating. Any neighbourhood should be so lucky.



Left to right: architect Joe Lobko, Artscape CEO Tim Jones, Councillor Joe Mihevc, and The Stop Executive Director Nick Saul.

*All photos by Hamutal Dotan/Torontoist.*