

'Any colour you want' at the new Paintbox

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Ryan Starr, Toronto Star/Yourhomes.ca

The goal of the immense Regent Park revitalization project, metaphorically speaking, is to give that troubled Toronto neighbourhood a blank canvas, a clean slate on which the community can create a brighter future.

So it's rather fitting what the Daniels Corp. — Toronto Community Housing Corp.'s exclusive builder and development partner on the 69-acre master plan — has chosen to name the latest condo in the Regent Park megaproject: Paintbox, which is complete with a multicoloured roofline.

The 26-storey Paintbox, currently under construction at Dundas St. E. and Sackville St., is being built atop the new \$24-million Regent Park arts and cultural centre.

The way Daniels vice president Martin Blake sees it, the name Paintbox does a great job of capturing the spirit of the cultural centre. "There's no predetermined route that centre will take, it can become anything," he explains.

"So we thought about a blank canvas, and the first thing that came to mind was paint box; you open up a paint box and whatever you want to create, this is your paint box — paint any colour you want."

It's a message he's hoping will resonate with both condo buyers and residents, old and new, of a refurbished Regent Park.

Paintbox is the first condo project in the second phase of the six-phase Regent Park revitalization; the second phase will include an additional three condo buildings.

The condo's 284 units range from 392-square-foot studios to 925-square-foot two-bedroom plus den suites and a few three-bedroom units.

The units are priced from the \$200,000s to just less than \$500,000. With the project now under construction, Daniels says buyers will be able to move in by next spring.

Paintbox purchasers can take advantage of the developer's gradual deposit payment plan. Buyers pay \$3,500 with the agreement of purchase and sale, and \$1,000 each month until they reach 5 per cent of the purchase price, or they move in.

“This allows that segment of the marketplace that has never been able to buy, because they cannot put together the 20 per cent down payment, to now become homeowners,” Blake says.

The Regent Park redevelopment encompasses lands stretching from Parliament St. to River St., and from Gerrard St. to Shuter St.

The first phase of the revitalization included OneCole Condominiums, at the corner of Dundas and Parliament; the building has been occupied for a year. Nearby, OnePark West, which sold out earlier this year, is also fully occupied. There are 51 condo townhouses, as well.

Together the first two phases account for 50 per cent of the total revitalization project.

The Regent Park renaissance will also include construction of new TCHC subsidized rental housing for existing residents, which Daniels will build, but the market buildings will be separate from the affordable housing stock.

Paintbox will have a 24-hour concierge and a Wi-Fi connected lounge. An amenities space on the fourth floor will include a party room that connects with a games room and an outdoor terrace with seating and dining space. There will be gardening plots on the fifth floor.

At the base of Paintbox sits the 60,000-square-foot Regent Park arts and cultural centre.

Funded 50/50 by the province and federal government, this three-layered building, operated by Artscape (www.torontoartscape.on.ca), will “showcase the amazing creative energy that permeates Regent Park and the surrounding neighbourhoods,” Daniels material says.

The first floor is the “Experience” level, with a 400-seat theatre and outdoor performance court. The Collective of Black Artists and the Native Earth Performing Arts will be the anchor tenants here.

The second floor, dubbed the “Learning” level, is dedicated to the development of talent in music, visual arts and film. Groups will include the Regent Park School of Music, the Cabbagetown Regent Park Museum and the Regent Park Film Festival.

“Innovation” is the theme of the third floor, where Toronto’s Centre for Social Innovation will have workspace for non-profits and social and arts entrepreneurs. “This is going to be a magnet for arts and cultural organizations to come to Regent Park,” Blake says.

The arts and cultural centre will be adjacent to Nelson Mandela Park Public School, which has been closed for the past few years as it has undergone a refurbishment. And the city plans to build a community centre beside the nearby Duke of York Public School.

Along with Paintbox, the second phase of the Regent Park revitalization will include the creation of a six-acre community park. Pedestrian mews will run from Dundas to Shuter Sts., and park pathways will connect residents to area amenities and provide space well suited for markets and street events. “It will become the hub,” Blake says.

There will also be a city-run regional aquatic centre with a workout pool, slide pool and diving pool.

Following 50 years of no commercial activity in Regent Park, the first phase of the revitalization introduced a host of name-brand retailers, including Sobeys, Tim Hortons, RBC and Rogers.

And the second floor of all new buildings will contain office space, Blake notes, giving residents a place to set up shop locally and ideally attracting workers from elsewhere in the city.

With people coming to and remaining in Regent Park to work, “the animation on the street changes completely,” he says. “It goes from being just a morning and night thing to being animated full-time.”

Originally envisioned as a “garden city,” Regent Park, Canada’s oldest and largest social housing project, didn’t work out as planned.

Parts of Old Cabbagetown was demolished and in its place was built a closed-off, inward-facing community that was in theory safer than city streets. But there was a problem. “There was almost an economic moat that went around it,” Blake says. “There was no business inside and no market housing. It was all social housing.”

Over the years Regent Park became notoriously crime-ridden and rundown. By the mid-2000s, the City of Toronto — which had social housing downloaded to it from the province — decided the time had come to raze the community and start anew.

During community consultations, residents were assured of their right to return to the old neighbourhood once the rebuilding was complete. This was significant, Blake notes. “Regent Park has a stigma attached to it, but the tenants were saying we want the right to come back.

“Residents were saying you can displace us but you have to let us come back, and I think that speaks to how passionate the people are about their community.”

Guaranteeing residents the right to return also helps guard against gentrification in Regent Park. “I think about gentrification as being something where people who used to live in a location can no longer afford to live in a location,” Blake says. “Toronto Community Housing’s tenants will still be under the rent-geared-to-income program, paying 30 per cent of their income per year to rent. So if you talk about gentrification,

you haven't lost those people; quite the opposite: you've guaranteed those people can come back."

Of course, as projects like Paintbox get built and sold, there will be an influx of higher-income residents into the area.

"But the opportunities that come with that are also coming in," Blake says, noting that 400 Regent Park residents got jobs thanks to all the construction and retail that's come to the area.

The assistant bank manager at the Royal Bank is a resident, he says, as are the managers for Tim Hortons. And the majority of Sobeys employees are from Regent Park. What's more, foreign-trained professionals who live in the area are working with engineering companies, and some residents have gotten jobs in construction.

"It all speaks to the opportunities here," Blake says.

For more information, go to www.paintboxcondos.ca.