

Canadian Brownfield Case Studies

158 Sterling Road



Source: Image 1: The Toronto Archives; Image 2: ArchDaily

Figure 1 & 2: Built in 1919, the Tower Automotive Building represents a relic of Toronto's manufacturing past. These images show the transformation of the building and surrounding site from manufacturing to contemporary uses.

PROJECT SUMMARY

158 Sterling Road is a large parcel of land adjacent to the CNR/CPR rail line that is located in Toronto's Junction Triangle neighborhood. The site is home to the Tower Automotive Building (see Figures 1 & 2), which is heritage-designated. The nearby train tracks made the neighbourhood a large industrial hub during the early and mid 20th century². However, due to economic and cultural shifts that have taken place over the last 50 years, much of the industry has found new homes or closed its doors³. The site was home to an aluminum foundry and later a car parts manufacturing plant which closed due to bankruptcy in 2006⁴. The location of the site within the Bloor-Landsdowne GO Major Transit Station Area, coupled with the Tower Automotive Building's architectural significance, made it a perfect opportunity for an adaptive reuse project, which was undertaken in 2009⁵. The site is now home to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Toronto, along with a mix of residential and employment uses. The current developments on the site have been recognized with a Brownie Award, as well as an Award of Merit in Conservation from the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals

Site History & Characteristics

In 1919, Northern Aluminum constructed a ten-storey manufacturing building in the art deco architectural style, which at its time of construction, was one of the tallest buildings in Toronto⁶. The site subsequently changed ownership several times over the 20th century,

however it maintained its core use as an aluminum foundry and manufacturing plant until 2005, when its owner Tower Automotive filed for bankruptcy⁷. In the same year, the City of Toronto designated the building (now known as the Tower Automotive Building) a heritage property⁸. The site is nestled on Sterling Road, which was home

QUICK FACTS

Location

Toronto, Ontario

Project type

Adaptive Re-use

Site size

18.2 Acres (73,700 m²)

Land uses

Mixed Use, General Employment Areas

Keywords/special features

Heritage, Adaptive Re-use, Arts and Culture, Infill, Intensification, Transit-oriented development

Website

<https://www.archdaily.com/914661/tower-auto-motive-building-museum-of-contemporary-architecture-architectsalliance>

Project address

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Toronto, Ontario

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Case studies were prepared as a course assignment by students enrolled in PL8312/PLE845: Brownfields & Sustainable Development, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Toronto Metropolitan University (Winter 2023). Information for the case studies was obtained from online sources, available reports, and, in some cases, site visits and direct communication with stakeholders.

If you are aware of any errors or updates to the case studies, please contact chris.desousa@torontomu.ca

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to a large manufacturing district in Toronto⁹. In more recent decades, Sterling Road also became an important hub for artists and creatives due to inexpensive rents and the availability of loft-style industrial spaces left over from the manufacturing days, which lent themselves well to studio uses¹⁰. A site remediation and redevelopment project was undertaken in 2009 and is ongoing. The revitalization of the Tower Automotive Building was completed in 2018 and the first five floors are now home to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Toronto, along with office spaces for the design and creative industries which occupy upper floors of the building¹¹. The MOCA and the Tower Automotive Building more broadly anchor surrounding development taking place at 158 Sterling Road, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

158 Sterling Road was purchased by Castlepoint Studio Partners Ltd in 2007 and most recently transferred to Sterling Park Developments Ltd in 2020¹². Between 2009 and 2011 site buildings including a machine shop, sand foundry and boiler house were demolished, leaving only the Tower Automotive Building on the site due to its heritage designation¹³. Site remediation and redevelopment is being completed on varying timelines as different areas of the site are in different stages of the planning approvals pipeline. Block 1 and block 3 (see Figure 2) of the site, which contain residential townhouses and the Tower Automotive Building respectively, have been completed¹⁴.

Cleanup

Site clean up and environmental remediation of 158 Sterling Road began in 2009 and is ongoing¹⁵. As per Ontario's regulatory context, a brownfield site with potential contaminants must undergo a multiphase environmental site assessment process and a Record of Site Condition (RSC) must be filed. AMEC Earth and Environmental carried out ground water monitoring and sampling beginning in 2009 and WSP Consultants have conducted multiple phase one and phase two environmental site assessments (ESA) for different blocks on the site¹⁶. Because there are a mix of uses being proposed for the site, including commercial/residential, parklands, and commercial/industrial, site remediation has taken place in different phases¹⁷. The revitalization of the Tower Automotive Building and the construction of



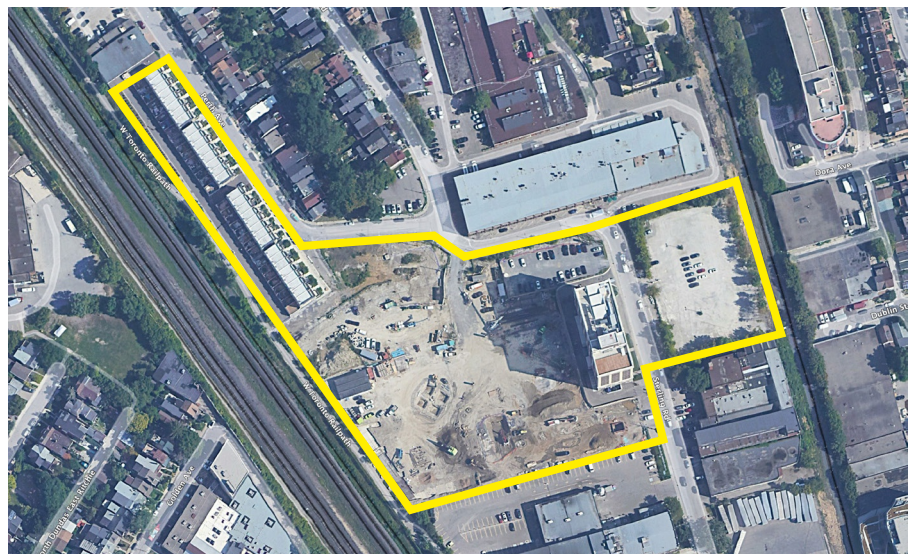
Figure 2: Map of the 158 Sterling Road site including planned land uses.

townhouses on the north western section of the site have been completed, however blocks 2, 4 and 5 of Figure 2 are still in the process of being remediated and redeveloped¹⁸.

Due to the on-site manufacturing of metal and the extensive history of industry and manufacturing along Sterling Road, along with the proximity to rail lines, it was determined that there was potential environmental concern regarding contamination of both the soil and the groundwater¹⁹. All buildings on the site except for the Tower Automotive Building were demolished between 2009 and 2012 to make way for site

remediation²⁰. Between 2009 and 2011 AMEC conducted a Hydrocarbon Oil Plume Remediation because of fuel oil storage tanks which were removed from the property prior to 2006²¹. The Oil Plume remediation addressed potential contaminants of concern including BTEX, PHC F1-F3, PAHs, and select VOCs²². This stage of the remediation was completed to Site Specific Risk Assessment Standards and included removing and importing approximately 30,000m³ of backfill soil that met Industrial/Commercial/Community Site Condition Standards²³.

Figure 3: 158 Sterling Road Site with Completed blocks 1 & 5c. Redevelopment is ongoing on rest of site.



The most recent phase of remediation and redevelopment includes a phase one and phase two site assessment that was filed in 2022 and is conducted for the northern portions of blocks 3B and 5B in Figure 2²⁴. This environmental remediation will enable the development of a park space and will offer connection between the site and the West Toronto Rail Path, located to the west of the site²⁵. Since this portion of the site is being remediated for parkland development, the applicable standards are the generic site condition standards with non-potable groundwater condition²⁶. No onsite treatment of contaminants of concern was undertaken²⁷. Instead, a total volume of 6090m³ of impacted soil has been excavated from the site and removed²⁸.

Site cleanup has been considered a benefit to the surrounding community and will continue to allow for infill and redevelopment to take place along Sterling Road²⁹.

Planning and Redevelopment

The 158 Sterling Road site is identified in the Junction Triangle Precinct Plan (2011) as a priority area for infill, mixed employment and residential uses, improved neighbourhood connectivity, and integrated public spaces³⁰. Planning and redevelopment of 158 Sterling Road represents a multi-faceted process that contributes to the above outlined goals of bringing a mix of uses to the area including

employment, housing, recreation and cultural space³¹. In 2011, an application was submitted to the City of Toronto to convert sections of the site from the Employment Areas Official Plan designation so as to allow for residential and mixed uses³². This initial application was refused by City Council and was appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB)³³. In 2014, an OMB decision allowed the lands on the north end of the site to be redesignated as Neighbourhoods and Mixed Use Areas, while the southern portion of the site remained Employment Lands³⁴.

In 2016, a Consent to Sever was approved by the Committee of Adjustment for block 1 (see figure 2) to build a townhouse condo complex³⁵. The townhouse complex was completed in 2019 and consists of 32 residential units built by the site owner and developer, Castlepoint Numa³⁶. During this same period of time, Castlepoint Numa also undertook the revitalization of the Tower Automotive Building which was completed in 2018³⁷. The project has been commended as an example of how to preserve employment lands and heritage assets through an adaptive re-use project³⁸. The building now houses the MOCA Toronto on its first five floors, and office and studio spaces on the upper five floors, which cater to creative industries and offer affordable studio spaces for artists³⁹.

The Southern site area has subsequently been sold from Castlepoint Numa to Hines, who

are now in the process of developing two six and eight storey office buildings which are constructed out of heavy timber⁴⁰. The office buildings will offer a total of 420,000 square feet of rentable office space and will similarly cater to creative industries⁴¹.

A privately-owned publicly accessible space (POPS) is also being developed on the site. This space will offer continuity between the leisure and recreational uses of the West Toronto Rail Path and Sterling Road. Ownership will be shared between Hines and Castlepoint Numa⁴².

158 Sterling Road demonstrates a diversity of interesting planning and redevelopment considerations because of its downtown-adjacent location, proximity to higher order transit corridors, and because of the heritage-designated Tower Automotive building. The redevelopment of the site has had to balance different city and community interests that stretch far beyond site cleanup. The call to protect creative uses in the area and preserving heritage assets is paralleled with the site's desirable location and potential for infill and densification. Creative public and private sector partnerships have demonstrated how redevelopment can be completed in a way that supports the existing community and creative uses while also meeting the needs of the future residents.

Financing

Ongoing site cleanup and soil remediation has been privately financed by Castlepoint Numa, the landowner and developer. As such, it is not possible to find exact costs for the project cleanup. In 2008, a City-Wide Community Improvement Project Area was adopted for Brownfields remediation which gave the developer eligibility for Brownfields Remediation Tax Assistance through the City of Toronto. This program was likely used to finance site remediation and cleanup⁴³. It is also important to note that the MOCA Toronto received a \$5.7 million grant from the federal government's Cultural Spaces Fund which helped to complete the renovation of its current space in the Tower Automotive Building⁴⁴. Castlepoint Numa has retained ownership of the building and has entered into a 40 year lease agreement with MOCA Toronto⁴⁵.



Figure 4: Tower Automotive Building and Surrounding site after completion of retrofit

Source: Castlepoint Numa, 2018

Lessons Learned

The redevelopment of 158 Sterling Road and revitalization of the Tower Automotive Building demonstrates a thoughtful and creative intervention in the unique Junction Triangle neighbourhood. By maintaining the Employment designation on the southern portion of the site and catering these spaces to different areas of the creative sector through private sector office spaces, a large museum space, and an affordable studio residency program run through MOCA Toronto, the redevelopment maintains continuity with existing neighbourhood character and land uses. The preservation of the heritage features of the Tower Automotive Building also pay homage to the site's industrial past. The current developments on the site have been recognized with a Brownie Award, as well as an Award of Merit in Conservation from the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals⁴⁶.

Endnotes

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