

Deerford Rd. Apartment Building Gets Green Makeover

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An east-end apartment building will soon be in the running for the greenest residence in the city as it is set to receive a full eco-makeover this fall.

The Toronto Green Community, a non-profit organization promoting environmental awareness, adopted the building at 12 Deerford Rd. as part of a pilot project targeting apartments where waste diversion rates are typically low.

Many residents are newcomers to Canada and are unsure of Toronto's recycling policies.

For starters, each apartment will receive a blue box for their recyclables and residents will be encouraged to participate in monthly information sessions and take part in developing a community garden.

"It's all part of community development," said Ellen Giles, a TGC board member and the project's coordinator. "The more we can get people involved, the better."

The project, which will be spread over four months, will be divided into four monthly eco-themes focusing on:

- Increasing Recycling and Reducing Waste
- Increasing Energy Conservation
- Increasing Water Conservation
- Ecological Gardening and Balcony Gardening

Different initiatives will be put in place throughout the building to reinforce green practices. For example, in the laundry area, boxes will be put out for residents to donate their old eyeglasses or cell phones to charity and to recycle their old batteries.

Recycling in buildings 'inconvenient'

About half of Toronto's one million residences are apartment units.

The city has had success with recycling in single-dwelling homes, but larger residences have been a challenge.

"Legally landlords have to offer recycling but the problem is absentee landlords who live in other countries and don't stick around to see if it's enforced," said Glenn De Baeremaeker, city councillor and chair of the city's public works and infrastructure committee.

"Plus, it's incredibly inconvenient."

Having to take recycling downstairs and outside in the dark, in the dead of winter is not exactly

motivating, he said.

"Convenience is a big factor for residence when it comes to recycling."

Toronto has its own lofty goals to become the greenest city in North America by 2010, but without apartment buildings getting on board, the challenge becomes an almost impossible feat.

The city so far has been focusing on getting single-family houses on board but starting next year, officials will look at implementing new policies that will encourage landlords to do the same.

"In two years time, every building will have a green bin for the first time," De Baeremaeker said.

The city will charge landlords according to the amount of garbage the building collects. If landlords put an effective recycling or organics program in place, and therefore have less of a garbage output, then landlords will pay the city less for garbage collection.

The hope is landlords will be encouraged to enforce recycling if it means they will have to pay the city less.

One of the best things about the TGC's pilot project is that it will encourage people to talk to each other, De Baeremaeker said.

"There's a certain anonymity in buildings where if you don't recycle, nobody will know," he said. "But when people begin to socialize, there are very high social expectations to recycle - very high community environmental standards."

Giles said it took her about a year to find a property manager that was willing to put in the time and effort to make the building green.

"That's been the real challenge," she said. "Most property managers are too busy - it's not at the top of their priorities.

That's not the case at the Deerford building where not only did the property manager agree to the pilot project but spent \$600 buying recycling bins for each unit in the building.

This isn't the first time the TGC has tackled apartment dwellers. Five years ago, Giles put a similar pilot project in place at a student housing complex on Charles St. Today, the apartment boasts a 40 per cent waste diversion rate, up from 5 per cent.

The difference this time is that most of the residents Giles is dealing with are newcomers to Canada, and often, they are unaware of Toronto's recycling policies and goals.

"Even people who live in the United States are not up to par with Toronto's recycling standards," the councillor said. "Recycling rates there are about 10 per cent."

Aside from unfamiliarity with the policies, there are also language barriers and feelings of social isolation.

"We're really enforcing the education and community development aspect," Giles said. "Most tenants

are being really positive and are getting a sense of the necessity to recycle."

Some of Toronto's waste diversion statistics:

- There are 480,000 single-unit homes in Toronto and 526,000 multi-residential homes
- Waste diversion for apartment dwellers is 13%, compared to 58% for single family dwellings
- Toronto sent approximately 750,100 tonnes of waste to Michigan landfill in 2005.
- The City is working towards achieving a diversion rate of 60% by 2008 and 100% by 2012.