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# RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION CASE STUDIES

## Built Projects

### THE RENAISSANCE AT NORTH HILL

Calgary, Alta.

1718–14<sup>th</sup> Ave. NW

#### Developer

The Apex Corporation

#### Date completed

2002

#### Site area

1 ha (2.5 acres)

#### Number, type of residential units

176 condominium units in two, 10-storey towers

#### Floor area

80–283 m<sup>2</sup> (858–3,044 sq. ft.)

#### Gross residential density

176 uph (units per hectare)

#### Landscaped open space

4,130 m<sup>2</sup> (44,500 sq. ft.) in roof and ground-level gardens

#### Maximum height

10 storeys

#### Number, type of parking spaces

196 total. One space per unit, plus 20 for sale, in above-ground garage.

#### Non-residential units

1,580 m<sup>2</sup> (17,000 sq. ft.) office space;

1,110 m<sup>2</sup> (12,000 sq. ft.) amenity centre containing library, meeting rooms, games room, exercise facility, home theatre

#### Pre-development usage

North Hill Shopping Centre parking lot

#### Selling price

Start at \$164,900. Average \$336,500



Figure 1: The Renaissance at North Hill

The Renaissance at North Hill is a 176-unit project in two, 10-storey towers. Developed on the former parking lot of the North Hill Shopping Centre, the project boasts excellent access to shopping and other surrounding amenities.



Figure 2: The Renaissance, showing landscaped terrace

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project was developed on the site of the former parking lot for the North Hill Shopping Centre, which continues to operate with underground parking. The Renaissance is an example of shopping centre intensification or "greyfield" redevelopment. In addition to the 176 units that range considerably in both size and price, the project includes 1,580 m<sup>2</sup> (17,000 sq. ft.) of office space and a generously sized (1,110 m<sup>2</sup> [12,000 sq. ft.]) amenity centre that includes a library, meeting rooms and games rooms.

The surrounding urban area beyond the shopping centre includes a park, low-density residential neighbourhoods, a rapid transit line and a number of highways. The buildings are of a high architectural standard and there is good attention to the esthetics of the project. The project features a range of unit sizes and is geared to adults without children.

Each unit has a single parking space assigned in an above-ground parking garage. With an additional 20 spaces for sale, there is a total of 196 parking spaces.

The project has secure elevator access to the North Hill shopping centre. Calgary's Advanced Light Rapid Transit (ALRT) line, which is powered by wind-generated electricity, is within easy walking distance. For the more energetic there is good access to Calgary's on-street bicycle route network. The project is located just outside the City's downtown.

From a landscape perspective, the Renaissance features private rooftop gardens as well as shared gardens at ground level. There is 4,130 m<sup>2</sup> (44,500 sq. ft.) of private open space, of which 2,880 m<sup>2</sup> (31,000 sq. ft.) is on a landscaped podium and the balance is at grade.

Many units have excellent views of the City skyline, Rocky Mountains and panoramic views of the Bow River Valley.

## PROJECT SUCCESS: DEVELOPER'S PERSPECTIVE

*The project was very well received. There were no problems with either the City or surrounding neighbourhood. **Bill Lefebre, vice president, The Apex Corporation.***

### Costs and financing

The project cost \$45 million to develop.

The project has been very successful for the developer, with an average of five units sold per month since it opened in 2002. Phase one (the first tower) is now 95 per cent sold with phase two (still under construction in late 2003) already 60 per cent pre-sold.

The project was financed through bank lending and corporate equity. There was no government financial assistance.

### Marketability and profitability

The developer built a \$500,000 sales centre on site as part of a comprehensive marketing strategy. The strong sales have led to the project meeting profit expectations.

### Obstacles

Unlike many residential intensification projects, The Renaissance encountered very few obstacles, which is one reason why it has been so successful for the developer. The project had the support of both the local alderman (councillor) and the City Planning Commission. The developer attributes the acceptance of the project by the neighbourhood to good communication throughout the development process.



Figure 3: The Renaissance is an integral part of the North Hill Shopping Centre.

The shopping centre owners lost a lot of surface parking space during construction but accepted the temporary inconvenience because they were involved in the project and because they saw the potential for new customers from the completed project.

The site was a little tighter to build on than a comparable greenfield project but this was not considered a major obstacle.

### City support

The local alderman, mayor, planning commission, and planning department all supported the project. Several public open houses ensured that the local residents were always well informed about the project and its progress.

### Lessons learned

The developer's advice to others doing similar projects is to be upfront, honest and communicate effectively with all partners.



Figure 4: Streetscape showing The Renaissance

## PROJECT SUCCESS: RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

*Briar Hill and Houndsfield Heights are beautiful, established neighbourhoods. Kensington shops are only a 20-minute walk away. An excellent public library branch is a five-minute walk.*

**Resident**

### Affordability

The Renaissance at North Hill has a range of unit styles and sizes that fit a range of budgets. Selling prices ranged from \$164,900 for the smallest unit (80 m<sup>2</sup> [858 sq. ft.]) to \$1,050,000 for a 283 m<sup>2</sup> (3,044 sq. ft.) penthouse, and averaged \$336,500. Condominium fees generally fall within a range of \$230 to \$520 per month. Condo fees for a \$336,000 unit are about \$460 per month. The average selling price for new condos in Calgary in 2002 was \$162,884.<sup>1</sup>

All residents surveyed consider their units good value for money, especially in light of rising real estate values.

### Design features, unit size and character

Residents are happy with the design of the units and consider the building's exterior to be very attractive, blending well with surroundings. The size of the units is considered generous although some residents would prefer more storage space.

The amenity area is very well equipped and designed to allow lots of natural light to illuminate work areas. There are good views from all of the upper units and the quality of the light penetrating the building was felt to be a very positive aspect.

### The neighbourhood and transportation

*Shopping, the library, and transit are all within one block. I rarely use my car.* **Resident**

The two residents interviewed said that the project's excellent location was one of its most important features. The shopping is immediately accessible (part of the same complex) and therefore residents do not need to use a car, even for grocery shopping.

A community hall, auditorium, golf course, community and neighbourhood shopping centres, a university, technical college and several restaurants are within walking distance.

A bus stop is located across the street and a light rail transit stop is immediately adjacent.

## PROJECT SUCCESS: MUNICIPAL PLANNER'S PERSPECTIVE

*There was a lot of involvement from the public through a number of meetings organized by the developer.*

<sup>1</sup> CMHC, Market Analysis, Prairies, Nunavut and N.W.T. Centre.

The surrounding community was relatively supportive despite the height of the project, which can often cause problems. **Ian Cope, lead planner, City of Calgary.**

### Neighbourhood opposition or support

Although the second phase of the project is not complete, The Renaissance project is considered to be successful so far from the City's perspective.

There were very few neighbourhood concerns before construction partly because the project is not immediately adjacent to low-rise neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood community association was heavily involved through a number of public forums and was relatively supportive of the project despite the height. The only complaints were from more-distant neighbours who felt that the project altered their view.

### Planning objectives

The project meets a number of Calgary's planning objectives including:

- increased densities in established neighbourhoods
- increased densities around ALRT line stations.



Figure 5: The rapid transit line adjacent to the project

### Does it fit into the neighbourhood?

The project fits very well with the existing shopping centre (Calgary's first shopping mall) and indeed has improved the centre considerably by creating a mixed-use neighbourhood and a high standard of architecture.

Low-density residential uses to the South and west were not negatively affected by the project because they are far enough away that the towers do not block their sunlight.

The rest of the site is bordered by existing commercial uses, highways and a park.

### Regulations and approvals

There was no need for an amendment to the official plan, but rezoning was required. The biggest hurdle was a technical issue. An adjacent site was contaminated from a previous use and development of The Renaissance was delayed for two to three months while it was established that the contamination did not threaten the site.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Renaissance at North Hill illustrates that redevelopment of large shopping centre parking lots to provide residential units can reap benefits for both the mall owners and developers. The developer considers good communications with surrounding neighbours, as well as building good relationships with the City, to be key factors in the success of this relatively problem-free project.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information can be obtained from:

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**Architect:** Peter Burgener, BKDI Architects  
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