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Mastering the plan: Mississauga's Erin Mills subdivision comes full circle with last parcel being filled in



Niall Haggart and Simona Annibale of Daniels, at the Credit Valley Hospital, an important component of the Erin Mills community. Tyler Anderson / National Post

By Suzanne Wintrob
Special to National Post

In the 1970s, John Daniels was at the helm of Cadillac Fairview Development Corp. and eager to start building on 5,000 acres of farmland in Mississauga. He envisioned an area with housing, shops, schools, parks and everything else that makes a neighbourhood. Before long, the New Town of Erin Mills was born, becoming the largest master-planned community in North America at the time.

Mr. Daniels moved on in 1982 to start Daniels Corp., and since then his firm has built more than 25,000 new homes across the GTA — 11,000 of them in Mississauga and Erin Mills. And now, almost four decades since the firm’s original foray into the Toronto suburb, it is beginning development on Erin Mills’s final parcels of land.

Nestled around Eglinton Avenue West and Erin Mills Parkway, plans for the last piece of high-rise land call for a 25-storey, 292-unit residential tower with 15 townhomes and retail at the base, as well as a 25-storey, 324-unit rental building. The final piece of low-rise land will comprise 74 low-rise condo townhomes that are currently under construction at Winston Churchill Boulevard and Destination Drive. These will fill in among the detached houses, high-rise condo suites, affordable housing, rental apartments and retirement units Daniels has built over the years.

According to Niall Haggart, Daniels’ executive vice-president, the firm decided to revisit Erin Mills several years ago, given Mississauga’s rapid evolution from a bedroom community to a thriving metropolis, thanks, in part, to the popularity of Erin Mills Town Centre, Credit Valley Hospital and rapid transit. The property in question was what he calls “undeveloped wasteland sitting around waiting for some master plan to take place.”

Master planning is rooted in the thinking of Jane Jacobs and other like-minded urbanists, Mr. Haggart says, and the concepts haven’t changed much over the years. In his view, it’s about organizing how a community is structured and how people and cars move and coexist throughout the space.

“You don’t want to be so car-centric as to lose sight of the pedestrian realm,” he says. “I think the most significant thing that has happened in the last 10 to 15 years is the importance of that pedestrian zone and what happens [there]. You want people to come and move freely and comfortably through any community.”



The terrace at Daniels Erin Mills will have gardens and seating areas.



Daniels Erin Mills will be 25 storeys with 292 units and 15 townhomes, and a 25-storey rental building.

Getting people moving builds on the City of Mississauga's larger development philosophy. Lesley Pavan, director of development and design for the city's planning and building department, says that 35 years ago most high-rise towers were set back from the street and were strictly for residential use. But today, the city encourages buildings that incorporate residential, retail and commercial components plus plenty of ways to get around by car, bus, public transit and foot. As part of this next phase in Erin Mills' master plan, Daniels will make intersection improvements including the removal of what Ms. Pavan calls the "pork chop island" — a channelized turn lane that constantly slows down traffic.

"Now the city has a philosophy to try and give an urban feel to some of these sites," she says. "We bring the buildings up to the street, there's a mixed-use component, more emphasis on the public realm, having strong streetscapes, strong connections to the sidewalk. There's an emphasis on transit connections, being able to move people through the site to use our transit. We want these areas to be where people can enjoy their entire life, whether they're young and getting their first place or whether they wish to age in the community. We provide that whole lifecycle housing."

With the rental building now under construction, workers will soon start digging the hole for the new condo tower named, appropriately, Daniels Erin Mills. It will include a fitness and cardio studio, party room, TV lounge, outdoor terrace and garden plots. The studios to two-plus-den units range from 429 to 1,240 square feet and are priced from \$194,900, with an option to combine suites to create three-bedroom units.

Occupancy is scheduled for Fall 2016. Phase Two will include a second high-rise condominium and courtyard.