

Kathy Renwald: Gore Park Lofts expected to rise within months

Sales at 121 and 125 King East started about four months ago. With little fanfare, half of the 40 units have sold.

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Tyler Ross in front of the Gore Lofts, at 121 & 125 King St. E. at Catharine. - Barry Gray, The Hamilton Spectator

Tyler Ross tuned into Hamilton's buzz about six years ago.

When he saw the migration of Torontonians here, the city's growth and low unemployment rate, he started looking for property.

As the owner of Scholar Properties, Ross develops multi-unit residential buildings. When he and company VP Jessica Caplan saw a century-old building at 121 King St. E. for sale in a prime location near Gore Park, they bought the "diamond in the rough" for \$775,000.

"It's close to transportation, the park, restaurants, it's a primo location," Ross says over a coffee just across the street from his company's new project, Gore Park Lofts (

Sales started about four months ago. With little fanfare, half of the 40 units have sold. This week he applied for a building permit. Work on the building should start within two months.



Construction of the Gore Park Lofts at the corner of King Street East and Catharine is expected to begin in a couple of months. This rendering of the project shows two new floors added to the four-storey Victorian era buildings at 121 and 125 King East. | Courtesy of Thier + Curran Architects Inc.

The concept of Gore Park Lofts solidified when Ross forged a partnership with Effort Group, a division of Effort Trust. They own 125 King St. E., the building next door.

"It started with a meeting to say, 'Hey, we're your new neighbour,'" Ross says.

As an outsider to the city, Ross was attracted to Effort Trust's reputation, vision and involvement in Hamilton. And blending the two skinny Victorian buildings into one condo project made more sense for design and construction work.

For David Horwood, Effort Group's vice-president, the Scholar Group was the partner he'd been waiting for.

"There are so many things we like about this project: Helping bring renovated residential living to the downtown core, restoring and rebuilding a great old building with irreplaceable details, and creating a number of prime retail spaces at streetfront to suit the requirements of stores, restaurants and offices wanting to be along LRT in the heart of Hamilton.

"We've done our homework, found a great partner and are working with best-in-class architects and contractors from Hamilton. It's very exciting."

"This isn't just another condo box," Ross says. "These are character buildings, with soaring ceilings and exposed brick, and the kind of charm that can't be reproduced."

Ross hired Thier + Curran Architects Inc. to design the adaptive reuse of the four-storey buildings.

Two new floors added to the top will be the sleek, contemporary condos some buyers prefer, while lower floors will showcase original elements such as brick walls, pillars and exposed ductwork — the classic "loft look." Some units will be multi-level, with a choice of finishes from "budget to opulent."



Gore Park Lofts will emphasize the history and character of the original buildings, with details like exposed brick walls in this artist's rendering. | Courtesy of Thier + Curran Architects Inc.

The 40 units range from about 500 to 900 square feet, with prices from \$300,000 to \$470,000.

When Ross and Caplan first toured 121 King St. E., they discovered the typical signs of neglect.

Floors two through four had been empty for years, with leaky roof damage inside. At ground level, retail uses came and went. The building, in the late 1800s, had been a showroom for stoves made by a nearby manufacturer.

In the building next door at the corner of King and Catharine, Effort Trust managed "under occupied" apartments, according to Ross.

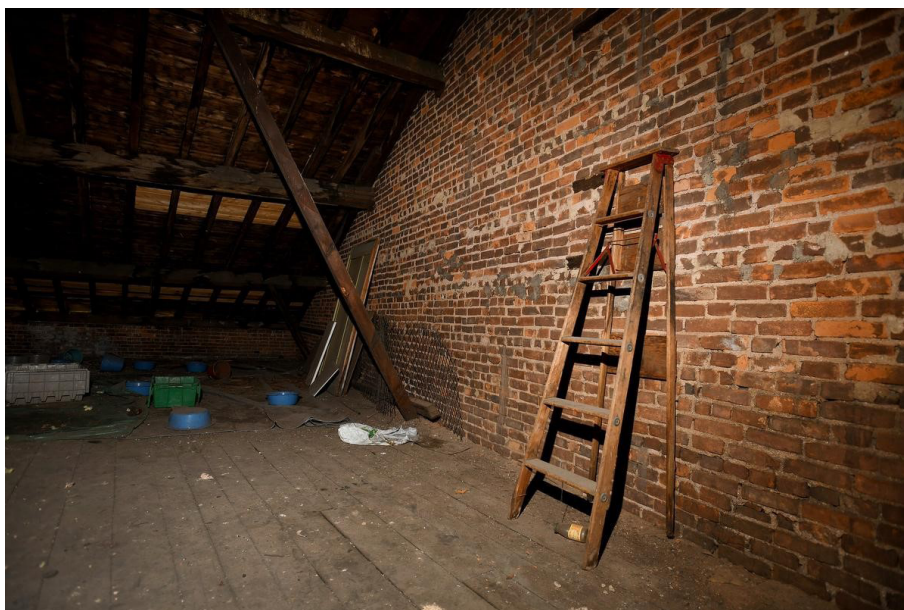
When sales started, Ross and Caplan thought the small units would be snapped up by young professionals and mature students. Instead, the biggest condos sold first — mostly to speculators.

"There's a climate today that wasn't around a year ago where there's a lot of publicity around cancelled projects," Ross says.

Stalled and cancelled projects, he says, have made prospective buyers wary. "That will change when we start to build."

The Gore Park Lofts have already cleared major municipal hurdles, including site plan approval and committee of adjustment for variances to permit offsite parking. When the building permit is issued, construction should take two years maximum, according to Ross, with a move-in target date of June 2021.

"But I hope it will be sooner than that. This is a great project, the location is at centre ice, in buildings with real Hamilton history."



The Gore Lofts builders hope to utilize the existing brick walls, such as these on the upper loft at 121, to provide a modern look. | Barry Gray, The Hamilton Spectator