

# DESIGNING WITH MASS TIMBER

**Rob Jowett**

If approved, a seven-storey mixed-use office tower proposed for the Junction Triangle neighbourhood would be the largest mass timber office / commercial building in Canada.

Developer **Next Property Group**, together with architect **Bogdan Newman Caranci**, is proposing to build a hybrid mass timber building, comprising wood, concrete and steel. Located at 57-77 Wade Avenue—near the intersection of Lansdowne and Bloor—the design calls for a gross floor area of 13,473 m<sup>2</sup>.

“What we’re really trying to do is design an environment that is suitable for today’s young workers,” Next Property Group managing partner **Jeff Segel** told *NRU*. “It’s to be a very warm, open-space environment with a lot of natural light, and I think that ultimately we’ll likely attract the high-tech industry to this area.”

Bogdan Newman Caranci partner **Jonathan King** told *NRU* that the firm did not specifically try to use wood in its design, but sought to create the best environment for the companies to which they plan to cater.

“The attractiveness of pursuing a mass timber [building]... was always at the back of our minds, but at the

end of the day we needed to find a system that ultimately works specifically for this particular use.”

The design is specifically focussed on attracting businesses in the technology sector.

“The technology sector in Toronto... has for some reason been very attracted to older buildings that have been renovated,” says Next Property Group president and CEO **Cary Solomon**. “Our original vision was to take a 1920s building in the garment district... and put it in a time machine and send it to 2020 and say, ‘what does this building look like?’”

The team determined that it would need to include a lot of

natural light, have high ceilings, and use wood whenever possible.

“There’s something about wood that is calming, warm, relaxing, and just a nice environment,” Solomon says.

With mass timber an increasingly attractive building material, King says new options became available to them.

“In this particular project... we’re incorporating a composite deck system, which combines the qualities of wood with the qualities of concrete, and combine them together to get the best attributes out of those two materials.”

Wood is typically not considered a good building material for post-and-beam

buildings because of the 10m spans, which are standard for this type of building. Normally this would require the wooden beam to be over a metre and a half deep. However, the hybrid design overcomes this by incorporating building techniques from bridges and other types of development, and repurposing them.

“We’re not necessarily re-inventing the wheel,” says Segel. “But we are using 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to put these components together in a new way.”

King says that in addition to design, the way the building functions is intended to support tech companies.

“This is anticipated to be an 18-hour building. It’s not a nine-to-five building in any measure.” Digital sector companies keep broad hours, which the team has made sure to accommodate.

Another essential design detail is its connection to the planned West Toronto Railpath. **Metrolinx** is building a multi-use trail along the railway line from Union Station to

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Rendering of 57-77 Wade Development LP’s proposed seven-storey building, which is to be constructed with mass timber, steel and concrete

ARCHITECT/SOURCE: BOGDAN NEWMAN CARANCI

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Barrie, and that rail line runs right behind the property at 57 Wade. The trail will allow pedestrians and cyclists to travel from Dundas Street all the way to the just north of Dupont.

“Part of our design... is actually to provide a connection between that trail...

and onto Wade,” says King. As a result, the building will be experienced from all sides, not just from the frontage on Wade Avenue.

The team says it hope that the building will bring benefits to the neighbourhood, and help rejuvenate the area.

“[The proposed building]

should bring...a level of enhanced safety to the neighbourhood, just through simple public occupation with people coming and going from a very active office building,” says Segel.

“I think that this building on Wade Avenue will be so transformative just by its mere presence,” says Solomon. “It is going to transform that area instantly.”

The preliminary staff report will be considered by Toronto and East York Community Council at its meeting May 2.

The site is owned by 57-77 Wade Development LP.

*Rob Jowett wrote this story while on assignment with NRU.* 