

# Creative Mixed-Use Buildings: A Made-in- Toronto Solution

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# Cities across Canada and the globe are wrestling with pressures from climate change, inequality, and the COVID-19 pandemic. University of Toronto researchers are exploring the potential of a new local model to create solutions to these complex challenges.

Led by [Professor Matti Siemiatycki](#), director of the [Infrastructure Institute](#) at the [School of Cities](#), researchers are examining the practice of mixing uses in one building, particularly combining residential or commercial space with large-scale public amenities such as schools or cultural facilities. Called the creative mixed-use model, these developments bring together public, private, and non-profit uses in innovative ways, locating a unique collection of organizations in the same facility.

The Institute's research is considering how new approaches to infrastructure investment like creative mixed-use could contribute to a healthier, more prosperous, equitable, and greener future in urban centres. Instead of a "siloe" approach to development, the creative mixed-use model proposes that each suitable project can be developed using collaboration as a cornerstone of healthy communities. This approach proposes that co-location and meaningful partnerships are key to getting the most out of every infrastructure investment and fostering more sustainable, equitable, and just cities.

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**The Toronto region is demonstrating inspired leadership in constructing creative mixed-use buildings that bring together new partners, and in new ways. The Institute has compiled more than 70 examples of partnerships building new developments that not only serve the needs of the individual partners but also contribute to stronger neighbourhoods.**



## **INTRODUCING THE INFRASTRUCTURE INSTITUTE**

The Infrastructure Institute is a training, advisory, and interdisciplinary research hub at the School of Cities. Its vision is to build local and global expertise in infrastructure planning, decision-making, and delivery.

Learn more about the creative mixed-use Initiative and many other projects at [infrastructureinstitute.ca](https://infrastructureinstitute.ca)

## **Working with Practitioners**

In collaboration with practitioners from the public, private and non-profit sectors, the Institute is working to understand how the model works best, and how to expand its use. As Professor Siemiatycki explains, the Institute is “trying to provide training on creative mixed-use buildings to bring it to the attention of a wider range of city builders and accelerate the practice with people who are already interested. We want to give public, non-profit and private sector organizations the capacity and the space that they need to build an ecosystem and move through the creative mixed-use development process more smoothly, learn from what’s happened in the past, take from the best practices, and be able to achieve the projects they want to build through this model.”

To this end, the Institute has recently hosted a number of events with practitioners from industry, government, and community organizations, and is launching new programs in 2022. This includes helping those interested in the model to identify and build the relationships they need to undertake creative mixed-use initiatives. In recent months, the Institute has:

- ➔ Provided a matchmaking service for building partners,
- ➔ Offered training modules to help organizations navigate complex development processes, and
- ➔ Provided site-specific support that integrates policy, design, and economic considerations into viable strategies.

The Institute is also working closely with practitioners, including staff at the City of Toronto, to uncover what else is needed to encourage greater uptake of the model and address the barriers each partner faces. Typical challenges include:

- ➔ A lack of access to scarce development sites,
- ➔ A need for additional project funding, community buy-in, or speedier permit approvals, and
- ➔ A need for specialized knowledge (e.g., a non-profit needing support on construction management; a developer needing greater understanding of the future residents or users of the facility).

With creative mixed-use developments, each partner comes to a project with their own motivations, priorities, expertise, and resources. The Institute is working to find common ground and support the relationship-building that will allow new projects to flourish.

“We’re looking to do this intentionally,” Professor Siemiatycki explains. “What you’ve seen through the pandemic is that there’s an acceleration of people who are saying, ‘let’s take this from a last resort to a first best option.’ And you’re starting to see many different organizations learn and partner together in all sorts of creative and interesting ways, being a little bit more intentional.”



#### LEARN MORE ABOUT CREATIVE MIXED-USE

To see the in-depth detail of some of the cases we’ve studied, please visit: <https://www.schoolofcities.utoronto.ca/creative-mixed-use/case-studies>



# Advancing Successful Implementation

In practice, what do a 300-unit condo development, a youth shelter, and a YMCA have in common?

What unites a storied heritage building, a university sports facility, and a grocery store?

Can a public school share common ground with a tech incubator and new condos?

How well can a theatre, a restaurant, and a 12-storey condo function together?







### George Brown / Cooper Koo Family YMCA

**Type:** New Construction

**Size:** 82,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (YMCA); 175,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (The George)

**Development Partners:**

- Waterfront Toronto
- Dundee Kilmer Developments
- Infrastructure Ontario
- George Brown College

**Status:** Opened in 2016



### Streetcar Crowsnest / The Carlaw

**Type:** New Construction

**Size:** 12,000 ft<sup>2</sup>

**Development Partners:**

- Streetcar Development
- City of Toronto
- Crow's Theatre

**Status:** Opened in 2017

**Figure 1.** Creative mixed-use (small scale)

There are dozens of examples of successful creative mixed-use projects in Toronto. Two examples (Figure 1) demonstrate the ability of unlikely partners to be able to work together through the building process to renovate and/or build new facilities and continue the relationship to maintain the building over time.

The model's value for cities lies in its power to build capacity through collaborative relationships. It enables the partners to overcome the particular obstacles they face by leveraging their collaborators' strengths, and in the process achieve more than

they could independently. In the examples presented here, each partner had unique expertise, resources, and interests, but only together were they able to build the facilities that met their needs.

As Professor Siemiatycki notes, "Creative mixed-use buildings are as much about relationships and collaboration as they are about architecture, finance, and design. Our work is to help cultivate technical expertise in collaborative city building."

## Lessons Learned to Date

In the process of researching these initiatives, the Institute has identified common challenges and opportunities that can inform practitioners and provide strategic advice for those interested in undertaking creative mixed-use development. Each arrangement is unique, and each has been able to achieve both a social purpose and advance the independent interests of each partner (Figure 2).



### Eva's Phoenix / Waterworks

**Type:** Renovation and New Construction

**Size:** 381,000 ft<sup>2</sup>

**Development Partners:**

- Eva's Phoenix
- MOD Developments
- Build Toronto
- Woodcliffe Landmark Properties
- City of Toronto

**Status:** Opened in 2020



### Ryerson Mattamy Athletic Centre / Loblaws

**Type:** Adaptive Re-use

**Size:** 350,000 ft<sup>2</sup>

**Development Partners:**

- Ryerson University
- Loblaw Companies Ltd
- Government of Canada

**Status:** Opened in 2020



### TIFF Bell Lightbox / Festival Tower

**Type:** Renovation and New Construction

**Size:** 547,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (TIFF)

**Development Partners:**

- TIFF Group
- The Daniels Corp
- City of Toronto
- Province of Ontario
- The King & John Festival Corp

**Status:** Opened in 2010

Figure 2. Creative Mixed-Use (large-scale)

Creative mixed-use projects can be more complex, costly, and time consuming to plan, deliver, and operate than a single-use development. These challenges include:

### Negotiations

Negotiations that involve the planning process and site-specific zoning permissions, and require multi-shareholder partnership arrangements

### Operational & maintenance questions

This includes considerations that arise with sharing space (e.g., parking, security, repairs).

### Specific design issues

These are the design issues unique to the development (e.g. the need for separate building entrances for each user group)

### Relationship-building

Relationship-building that is crucial among diverse partners who may not have worked together before, to ensure an enduring and cooperative partnership.

Creative mixed-use developments also offer opportunities for partners to leverage one another's expertise to enable their projects to advance. These opportunities include:



**Individual know-how, skills, and resources** that are leveraged for the greater shared benefit



**Financial and social value** of assets that benefit each partner, various user groups, and the city



**Efficiencies** that are created in some areas (e.g., operating and managing shared buildings)



**Enhanced trust and familiarity** among unexpected partners



## Advancing Successful Implementation

Each creative mixed-use project is unique, and practitioners should keep in mind that the challenges and opportunities, and the experiences of each partner, are also unique. In Toronto, the model has largely been successful, particularly in helping to build capacity through collaborative relationships. Key considerations for practitioners include:

1. Duration and complexity of project delivery
2. Synergy of uses
3. Interaction of users
4. Availability of new funding for critical public infrastructure

More advice and resources for practitioners are available through the Infrastructure Institute [website](#).





## Interview with Matti Siemiatycki

### What sparked your interest in researching creative mixed-use buildings?

What first got me interested in these projects is that they really are genuine partnerships. It's a relationship where two different parties own a building, like two people who own neighbouring condos or who share a wall in a semi-detached house. It's a longer-term relationship, and there's so much more to it than with a contractual relationship. A lot of it is about human relations – how people work together and under what conditions, and how you ensure that each party feels like they're getting what they need in a context where each of them wants something different. There's a thicket of relationships that are all coming together. A lot of our work is about how you build relationships as much as it is about how you design a building or how you write a contract. I think it's less like a contract and more like a marriage.

Read the full text of the [interview here](#).



Matti Siemiatycki is the Director of the Infrastructure Institute at the School of Cities and Professor in the Department of Geography and Planning.

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## How does the creative mixed-use model differ from a traditional public-private partnership (“P3”)?

The word “partnership” in a public-private partnership is stretching the definition of the word “partnership” – it’s actually a public-private contract. The model is designed to bring together parties from the public and private sectors to create a contract that aligns their interests and transfers risk between the parties. You see that in the type of tensions that arise between P3 parties because they’re working in this space of a contractual relationship. Creative mixed-use developments are much more representative of genuine partnerships between the parties than P3s.

## How do creative mixed-use developments actually help cities?

What the creative mixed-use model is doing – and what we’re trying to enable – is keeping the social purpose for communities and cities front and centre as the city grows. Not having growth and not having development is going to be problematic, and yet we have also seen the downsides of development – displacement, gentrification, affordability issues. You can enable development, but you can do it in such a way that the social mission of the city remains strong and thrives.



“ You can enable development, but you can do it in such a way that the social mission of the city remains strong and thrives. ”



# What's next for this project?

**The Infrastructure Institute will continue to advance its work on creative mixed-use, and support collaboration among partners that want to develop multi-use buildings with a social benefit.**

This includes advising the City of Brampton, which is in the process of planning a new Urban Community Hub that integrates new residential housing with a school, library, recreation centre, a tech incubator, and more.

The creative mixed-use Initiative is informing a related project, the Institute's Social Purpose Real Estate Accelerator. Launching in 2022, the program will take promising development proposals through a structured process to facilitate their construction. For example, there are non-profit organizations with aging facilities that they want to repurpose as mixed-use developments. The Accelerator will help them find the right investors and partners so they can rapidly implement their vision and maximize the value – both financial and social – of their assets. These buildings in turn make a valuable contribution to the wider city.

The Institute will also be expanding its Unlocking Public Facilities – Proof of Concept project with CreateTO, the City of Toronto's real estate agency, to examine opportunities to co-locate single-storey fire and paramedic stations with affordable housing, social services, and commercial uses. The City owns over 130 fire and paramedic stations, many in rapidly-growing neighbourhoods. A successful pilot has the potential to transform the delivery of public services with a model that can unlock the value of city-owned real estate and become a blueprint for other cities.

## About the School of Cities

The School of Cities is a solutions incubator for urban-focused researchers, educators, students, practitioners, and the general public to explore and address the complex global challenges facing urban centres. A living laboratory, the School leverages urban data and lived experience to improve policy and decision making and collaborates with city leaders around the world to make local decisions that make cities and urban regions more sustainable, prosperous, inclusive, and just.

## About City Research Insights

*Creative Mixed-Use Buildings: A Made-in-Toronto Solution* is the second in our series of City Research Insights, designed to link the urban research being conducted at the University of Toronto with the public, other institutions, and decision makers.

With this series, the School of Cities seeks to leverage our extraordinary community of urbanists and urban-oriented researchers to create a rich, multidisciplinary community of urban faculty, researchers, and students across disciplines and perspectives. In addition to facilitating interdisciplinary research projects, partnerships, and funding opportunities, we provide a hub for urban-focused interdisciplinary and collaborative learning.

**CITY RESEARCH INSIGHTS****VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2: CREATIVE MIXED-USE BUILDINGS: A MADE IN TORONTO SOLUTION**

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Unless otherwise noted, all information is based on the work of the Infrastructure Institute.

Learn more about the Infrastructure Institute's work here:

<https://infrastructureinstitute.ca/work/>





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