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West Don Lands: Toronto's first 21st-century community

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It's little more than a sea of mud today, but don't get used to it. This is the West Don Lands, a large swath of land south of King St., west of the Don River. By the time work is finished, the neighbourhood will be home to as many as 12,000.

Not only that, but the West Don Lands will be Toronto's first 21st-century community. Dense, sustainable, compact and connected, it will be organized around the seven-hectare park - Don River Park - that is already taking shape. The new green space will occupy the high point of a "flood protection landform" that has been under construction for several years. Because the Don Lands are located in the flood plain of the Don River, ground level had to be raised to allow for human habitation. That process is almost complete.

If Torontonians have heard of the West Don Lands, it's likely because it will also be the location of the 2015 Pan-American Games athletes' village. Once the games are over, the complex will become permanent residences. A social housing development is also scheduled to begin construction this year.

One of the most interesting and innovative aspects of the redevelopment program is Underpass Park. It will consist of a series of interventions - everything from benches and soccer pitches to gardens and cafes intended to open up the gloomy spaces beneath the Adelaide, Richmond and Eastern Ave. overpasses that bisect the site.

Then there will be Toronto's first-ever woonerfs. These are streets specially designed so that pedestrians and cars are equals. That means narrow roads with no curbs or sidewalks. The main arteries will resemble any other conventional street in the city, but woonerfs have never been seen here.

Keep your eyes peeled.