



**ABOVE** Designed by Thier + Curran Architects, the Richmond Hill HUB, north of Toronto, combines seniors' housing with a youth shelter and drop-in centre.

## SYNERGIES FOR SOCIAL GOOD

Architects are often known for their skill in optimizing client programs, and Hamilton-based Thier + Curran Architects (TCA) is no exception. Community-building synergies are behind a pair of their recent projects: a social service oriented development in Hamilton, and another in Richmond Hill.

For over 50 years, the non-profit Hamilton Good Shepherd has provided services for the area's homeless population. In the mid-2000s, the Catholic Diocese offered it a piece of vacant land in an up-and-coming neighbourhood to build a women's shelter.

TCA was hired to design the shelter, but after preliminary analysis of the large lot, they felt there was a moral obligation to develop more. "We could build three more buildings on the property without compromising anything, and it would actually be a nicer development and better for the community," recalls Bill Curran, MRAIC.

It took 12 years of fundraising and approvals to realize that vision, accompanied by "horrendous NIMBYism, and an OMB hearing full of neighbours saying 'we don't want those people here,'" says Curran. One of the advantages of creating a larger development meant that this process only had to be navigated once—rather than through multiple consultations if the property was built up more incrementally. Moreover, "there are 6,000 families on the waiting list for affordable housing in Hamilton," says Curran. Creating more units helped with addressing this demand.

In the end, Good Shepherd Square includes a courtyard building with a pair of shelters: one for older women with mental issues, and another for domestic abuse victims. A shared services wing includes community outreach spaces such as a chapel, rooms for drop-in counseling, and a medical clinic. Two eight-storey subsidized apartment blocks front onto the main street, one tailored for families and the other for seniors. Another building, a three-storey apartment, is yet to come.

In the case of the Richmond Hill HUB, TCA teamed up with a contractor to respond

to a call for design-build proposals to create a seniors' apartment tower. After winning the project, the client from the Region of York approached the team to ask if a youth shelter and drop-in centre could be added.

It was a "shot-gun wedding" between programs, says Curran—but they found a way to spatially separate the youth functions from the seniors' centre. They tucked the youth shelter towards the back of the building, and created indoor and outdoor amenity spaces for the seniors on the third floor.

Similar to Good Shepherd, the pairing of programs helped to address the region's pressing social service needs. TCA had support from the mayor and council in facing neighbours' concerns; again, those battles only needed to be fought once.

In many cases with social service projects, Curran says, NIMBY concerns dissipate once a project is up and running, particularly if care has been taken with the architecture. "A critical part is that it must not look institutional. It must be home," says Curran. The façades of Good Shepherd Square use high-quality clay brick, and patterning that matches the scale of adjacent single-family homes. For the Richmond Hill HUB, TCA worked to break down the scale of the 10-storey building for it to integrate more closely with present and future development.

Working with tight budgets of \$160 and \$180 per square foot respectively, TCA aimed to combine challenging programs, while creating buildings that are home-like inside, and form quiet background buildings from the outside.

"Good Shepherd's motto is 'faith in people,' and a lot of that is about dignity," says Curran. "Architecture really does impact people—it affects their quality of life and their feeling of self-worth that they live in a nice place." As a result of that sensitive outlook, Hamilton and Richmond Hill have new structures that, despite their eccentricities, are turning out to be good neighbours.

Elsa Lam [ELAM@CANADIANARCHITECT.COM](mailto:ELAM@CANADIANARCHITECT.COM)

CANADIAN  
ARCHITECT

**EDITOR**

ELSA LAM, MRAIC

**ART DIRECTOR**

ROY GAIOT

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

SHANNON MOORE

**EDITORIAL ADVISOR**

IAN CHODIKOFF, OAA, FRAIC

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**

ANNMARIE ADAMS, FRAIC

ODILE HÉNAULT

DOUGLAS MACLEOD, NCARB, MRAIC

**REGIONAL CORRESPONDENTS**

**HALIFAX** CHRISTINE MACY, OAA

**REGINA** BERNARD FLAMAN, SAA

**MONTREAL** DAVID THEODORE

**CALGARY** GRAHAM LIVESEY, MRAIC

**WINNIPEG** LISA LANDRUM, MAA, AIA, MRAIC

**VANCOUVER** ADELE WEDER, HON. MRAIC

**VICE PRESIDENT & SENIOR PUBLISHER**

STEVE WILSON 416-441-2085 x105

**SALES MANAGER**

FARIA AHMED 416-441-2085 x106

**CUSTOMER SERVICE / PRODUCTION**

LAURA MOFFATT 416-441-2085 x104

**CIRCULATION**

CIRCULATION@CANADIANARCHITECT.COM

**PRESIDENT OF IQ BUSINESS MEDIA INC.**

ALEX PAPANOU

**HEAD OFFICE**

101 DUNCAN MILL ROAD, SUITE 302

TORONTO, ON M3B 1Z3

**TELEPHONE** 416-441-2085

**E-MAIL** [elam@canadianarchitect.com](mailto:elam@canadianarchitect.com)

**WEBSITE** [www.canadianarchitect.com](http://www.canadianarchitect.com)

Canadian Architect is published monthly by IQ Business Media Inc..

The editors have made every reasonable effort to provide accurate and authoritative information, but they assume no liability for the accuracy or completeness of the text, or its fitness for any particular purpose.

**Subscription Rates** Canada: \$54.95 plus applicable taxes for one year; \$87.95 plus applicable taxes for two years (HST - #80456 2965 RT0001). Price per single copy: \$6.95. Students (prepaid with student ID, includes taxes): \$27.00 for one year. USA: \$105.95 US for one year. All other foreign: \$125.95 US per year. Single copy US and foreign: \$10.00 US.

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: Circulation Dept., Canadian Architect, 101 Duncan Mill Road, Suite 302 Toronto, ON M3B 1Z3.

Postmaster: please forward forms 29B and 67B to 101 Duncan Mill Road, Suite 302 Toronto, ON M3B 1Z3. Printed in Canada. All rights reserved. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced either in part or in full without the consent of the copyright owner.

From time to time we make our subscription list available to select companies and organizations whose product or service may interest you. If you do not wish your contact information to be made available, please contact us via one of the following methods:

**Telephone** 416-441-2085 x104

**E-mail** [circulation@canadianarchitect.com](mailto:circulation@canadianarchitect.com)

**Mail** Circulation, 101 Duncan Mill Road, Suite 302, Toronto, ON M3B 1Z3

**MEMBER OF THE CANADIAN BUSINESS PRESS**

**MEMBER OF THE ALLIANCE FOR AUDITED MEDIA**

**PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT #43096012**

**ISSN 1923-3353 (ONLINE)**

**ISSN 0008-2872 (PRINT)**

RAIC | IRAC  
Architecture Canada

Alliance for  
Audited Media



MIX  
Paper from  
responsible sources  
FSC® C014584

Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

Canada