

THE RISE OF SODO

Much-Needed Amenities Coming to Vancouver's Booming South Downtown District

It used to be that Vancouver's South Downtown – the area developers refer to as SoDo – was a rather seedy area you passed through as you drove between Yaletown and the West End. Not anymore. The area is undergoing rapid change and tall residential towers are emerging around and between the access points to the Granville Street Bridge as well as further west on Burrard.

Construction has been intense for the past few years – and is not likely to let up any time soon. Cressey Development Group's Maddox (215 units – pictured), Onni Group's The Mark (302 units), and Rize's Rolston (187 units) are all offering move-in-ready homes, and will soon join Concert Properties' Salt (194 units) as sold-out developments. On the horizon: Westbank's iconic Vancouver House (388 units) and Bonds Group of Companies' Tate Downtown (333 units) are both in preconstruction, with Jimmy Pattison and Reliance's massive Burrard Place (810 market and rental units – formerly known as Burrard Gateway) seeking rezoning approval from the City of Vancouver. The City is also looking to sell off the derelict Continental Hotel, currently sandwiched between the bridge's off-ramps.

But the area is already enormously underserved by amenities such as grocery stores and restaurants – so how will it cope with a massive population boom?

"There's been unbelievable change in the last five years," says Hani Lammam, executive vice-president at Cressey. "The decision to live in a setting like this is all about enjoying the conveniences of urban life. There are currently fewer retail services than in other parts of downtown, but they're coming." Lammam notes that as soon as Cressey's Maddox development sells out, its ground floor presentation centre space will become retail space.

Signs of the tide turning in terms include rumours that restaurateur Umberto Menghi plans to reopen Il Giardino imminently. And starchitect Bjarke Ingels will be incorporating restaurants, retail and public art into Vancouver House, slated for completion in 2018. On the project's website, he talks of turning the site into a "village full of alleyways and plazas for a dense, lively urban environment."

And for Burrard Place, given the Jim Pattison Group's involvement, it is largely anticipated that a much-needed grocery store, possibly an Urban Fare, will

be part of the commercial footprint.

That, according to CBRE Vancouver's Adrian Beruschi, is what SoDo needs to put it over the tipping point in the minds of retailers. Beruschi is seeking tenants for a number of commercial spaces in the neighbourhood. "There's no shortage of interest, but right now the spaces cater to smaller retailers," he said. "South Downtown is an emerging market in the downtown core, but it's still not a distinct area. It lacks an anchor, but if [Burrard Place] moves forward it will provide the scale for a town centre."

New amenities are something that Maddox owner Mike Orchison is looking forward to. The former Yaletown resident and his wife moved into their two-bedroom condo earlier this year. They love their new home but feel they have given up a number of conveniences.

"What we have now is the 7-Eleven, which is a joke," he said. "A grocery store would help this community thrive..."

I think within a few years we'll see that change. There are more highrise projects happening,

which will bring more people who will demand amenities."



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