



## RESCON: Future Toronto residents face water crisis

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**Published:** September 24, 2019

**Updated:** September 24, 2019 4:54 PM EDT



The construction of above-ground parking for Toronto and the GTA – like the Eaton Centre (Bay St. parking entrance shown here) – helps to avoid digging into water tables as well as saving costs.

We need to build parking above ground.

Why? Toronto and the GTA are in the middle of a water crisis – not a shortage from your tap,

but a serious challenge managing everything flushed down your drains, falling from the sky or collecting below ground.

The City of Toronto has completed two of four workshops updating its Groundwater Management Strategy, including consultations with the development community.

Ultimately, they want to explore future infrastructure planning and groundwater discharge system options.

The focal point here involves high-rise buildings with underground parking garages, which commonly encounter issues with groundwater.

As you may have read in this space, building underground parking spaces isn't ideal. Typically when excavations extend deeper than two storeys, there is an excellent chance of encountering groundwater or penetrating the water table.

Toronto Water wants underground parking structures of new condo buildings to be completely watertight: without underground drainage systems, it is unrealistic to permanently keep water out indefinitely.

Equally as important at a time when we witness more frequent heavy rainfall in the GTA, stormwater management is crucial, yet Toronto is plagued with antiquated combined sewers (stormwater and sanitary sewers combined into a single pipe).

During wet weather, the volume of stormwater may exceed the sewer system's capacity and the sewer may overflow, which can cause basement flooding and release untreated sewage into our rivers and lakes.

Or worse. Look at what happened near Jane and St. Clair when two men were trapped in an elevator inside a flooded underground parking lot – it was a huge relief that the police arrived in time to save them.

In recent years, some condo developments have constructed watertight, underground parking structures at the behest of the City. But ultimately, new-home buyers pay for this unnecessarily complicated construction practice to alleviate some burden on Toronto's aging sewer infrastructure.

Instead of finding an innovative solution, City policies have further eroded affordability by mandating watertight underground parking structures.

As per a recent report by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, a parking spot in one of these new garages costs between \$80,000 to \$100,000. (If you're doing the math, don't forget to add the interest on that extra cost included within your mortgage.)

OK, Lyall, give me a solution, you say. No problem, folks – tell your city councillor to start building above-ground parking structures. With the demand for parking falling every year as

transportation habits evolve – more people are relying on ride-hailing services such as Lyft and Uber – parking demand will fall in the coming decades.

Therefore, the parking spaces we need now might be obsolete in 20 years. Unlike Underground parking, above-ground parking can be repurposed for residential or commercial uses.

We all know there is a desperate need for creativity in building spaces for new residents and businesses in a city and region that's growing exponentially year over year. In fact, Ontario's Ministry of Finance projects the population in the City of Toronto will grow by over one million people between 2016 and 2041.

To accommodate future Torontonians, we must continue urban intensification of our housing products – not just high-rises, but also the missing middle. We need zoning in place to accommodate the construction of mid-rise condos (four to 12 storeys), stacked townhomes, back-to-back towns, sixplexes or even laneway homes.

And let's not forget above-ground parking structures – which facilitate quicker and cost-effective construction – we need creative solutions to help people find homes.

But in the meantime, this isn't just a prediction; this is fact: constrained sewer infrastructure and stormwater management will be the biggest barrier to overcome for new development and construction as we build to accommodate a burgeoning pool of homebuyers and renters.

Let's help with above-ground parking and see where the conversation takes us.

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