

Designing with Purpose: An Affordable and Accessible Rental Community at 275 Merton Street

Presented to AAC Speed Networking Event

May 2026

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Collecdev Markee

**A Legacy of
Homebuilding.**

**A Commitment to
City Building.**



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Collecdev was founded in 2016 as the condo arm of Shiplake, and has since then completed nine exceptional multi-family mid-rise and high-rise buildings in Toronto.

Markee was built on over 50 years of combined expertise in finance, real estate development, and land use planning, leveraging the best of private sector practices and expertise to deliver on a social mission through the design, build, and operation of exceptional multi-family housing.

In 2024, Collecdev and Markee merged to become **Collecdev Markee**, a fully integrated developer with a pipeline of more than 8,000 new homes.

Our mission is simple: We build **high-quality urban homes in **complete communities**.**

Whether for rent or for purchase, attainable or high-end, we create **great places to live for all Torontonians.**

We align and deliver on multiple city-building objectives

Collecdev Markee plans, designs, and builds resilient, complete housing communities.



Overview of 275 Merton Street



Merton Overview & Background

- 1 Transformative Development**
40 storey, 494-unit rental building featuring 1,300 SF of flex retail space and 30% affordable units.
- 2 Sustainable and Accessible Development**
A Rick Hansen Foundation Gold and Toronto Green Standard Tier 2 building.
- 3 CreateTO – Partnership**
Collecdev Markee has entered a land lease on City owned land for 99-year lease.
- 4 Construction Ready**
Demolition began in September 2025 & the project just recently received NOAC.

267-275 Merton Details



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494 Units

- **38** Bachelor Units
- **278** 1-Bedroom Units
- **128** 2-Bedroom Units
- **50** 3-Bedroom Units

100 Units Designated to be Barrier Free

30% affordable rental

- **149** Total Units
- Realty tax and development charges on these units have been waived

Infrastructure & Community

- Connected to Beltline
- Mixed-use retail in podium
- 224,410 SF of amenities, (gym coworking spaces)
- Private Owned Public Space (POPS)



A Case Study on Accessible Design

Why CDM Pursued RHFAC Gold



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01 CreateTO Partnership

Our land lease with CreateTO on City-owned land came with an expectation to demonstrate leadership in accessible, inclusive housing. RHFAC Gold was the natural framework to meet and exceed that commitment.

2 CMHC Funding & Financing

RHFAC Gold certification unlocks improved financing terms through CMHC's Affordable Housing programs. Demonstrating measurable accessibility outcomes strengthens the business case for the project.

03 A Menu Approach to Accessibility — Beyond Mobility

Unlike prescriptive building codes that focus almost exclusively on mobility challenges, RHFAC's structure offers a "menu" approach, rewarding design decisions that address vision, hearing, cognitive, and sensory disabilities. This gave our team the flexibility to pursue holistic, human-centred design choices rather than minimum compliance.

What is the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC)?



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The RHFAC is Canada's leading rating system for measuring the accessibility of buildings. Unlike prescriptive building codes focused primarily on mobility, RHFAC uses a menu-based approach that rewards design decisions across a full spectrum of disabilities – mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive, and sensory.

How It Works

Buildings are assessed by a trained RHFAC professional across multiple categories including exterior routes, entrances, interior circulation, signage, washrooms, emergency systems, and residential units.

Each category is scored based on the presence and quality of accessible design features. Points are only awarded when features are applied consistently – ensuring the building works for all users, not just in designated spaces.

The rating is expressed as a percentage of total available points, with two levels of certification available depending on the final score achieved.

RHFAC Certified | 60% or above

Recognizes buildings that demonstrate a meaningful commitment to accessibility. The building must satisfy all mandatory prerequisites and score 60% or above across the rated categories.

RHFAC Gold | 80% or above

The highest tier of RHFAC certification, recognizing buildings that go well beyond the standard. Gold requires satisfying all mandatory prerequisites and achieving 80% or above.

Both levels require mandatory prerequisites to be met before a score is calculated. Prerequisites include features such as accessible entrances, power-operated doors, universal washrooms, visual fire alarms, and tactile attention indicators – the non-negotiable baseline from which all rated features are built.

The Rick Hansen Certification Process



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Step 1 — Engage Early Retain an RHFAC-certified professional at the Schematic Design phase, before drawings are locked. Early engagement means accessibility considerations are built into the design from the outset, rather than retrofitted later at greater cost and disruption.

Step 2 — Preliminary Design Review Once the design is sufficiently established, your RHFAC professional reviews the full drawing set (Architectural, Interior Design, and Mechanical and Electrical) against the RHFAC rating criteria. This produces an initial score and identifies where points are being earned, where they are being left on the table, and where targeted changes would have the greatest impact.

Step 3 — Iterate and Refine Work through successive rounds of design review with your RHFAC professional. Each iteration incorporates recommended changes and recalculates the score.

Step 4 — Reach the Gold Threshold Continue refining until the project scores 80% or above. At 275 Merton, this process took a few iterations, moving the project from an initial score of 69% to a final pre-construction score of 81.9%, allowing Pratus to proceed with applying for the certification. This is where the Merton project currently stands.

Step 5 — Formal Site Rating Near substantial completion, the RHFAC-certified rater conducts an on-site assessment of the built project, verifying that the design intent was carried through into construction. This is the formal rating that determines the certified score.

Step 6 — Gold Certification The completed rating is submitted to the Rick Hansen Foundation. Upon confirmation of Gold, the project receives its official certification, designation, and the right to market the building as RHFAC Gold certified.

CDM Retained Pratus Group to Provide Consultation on Accessible Design and Conduct the Scoring

Pratus Group is a firm focused on Sustainability and Accessibility. Within their team, they have RHFAC professionals who are trained and designated to complete the RHFAC ratings.



Overall Score: Where We Stand

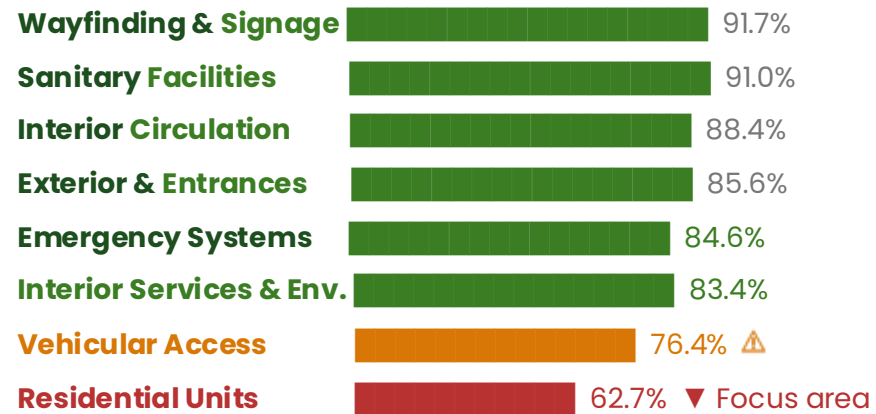


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81.9%

Current Overall Score
Gold Threshold: 80.0%

Score by Category



Gold threshold is 80% overall – not required per category. Score based on 275 Merton RHFAC assessment, Jan 2026.

Designing the Common Areas: Accessibility as the Default



Creating an accessible third space wasn't a compliance exercise, it was the starting point. A great common area is one that everyone can move through, rest in, and enjoy. That meant designing every shared space at 275 Merton from the principle that accessibility is simply good hospitality.

Seamless Journey from Door to Door: From the moment a resident or visitor arrives at 275 Merton, whether through the main entrance, the parking garage, or the loading area, their path through the building is clear, uninterrupted, and free of barriers all the way to the threshold of their unit. This was achieved through:

- **Generous circulation widths:** furniture and fixtures carefully selected to preserve wide passageways, with natural rest nodes created at regular intervals along longer routes
- **Intuitive wayfinding:** physical signage placed at key decision points and reinforced with visual memory cues that orient residents without requiring them to search for direction
- **Colour-contrasted finishes:** a palette chosen specifically for contrast between floors, walls, and doors, making the building legible for residents with low vision and easier to navigate for everyone



Amenity Spaces Designed for Everyone

Our common areas were designed from the outset to be genuinely usable by residents with a wide range of abilities, not adapted after the fact, but conceived from the beginning as spaces that belong to everyone.

This was achieved through:

- **Biophilic design and sensory planting:** integrated throughout the Garden Room, offering restorative spaces that benefit residents with cognitive, sensory, and mental health needs
- **Varied seating and standing options:** a range of heights, with and without armrests, across all amenity areas so every resident can find a place to rest comfortably
- **Accessible gym equipment:** selected to support residents across a spectrum of physical ability, not just those without mobility challenges
- **User-controlled task lighting:** in co-working and activity areas, accommodating residents with sensory sensitivities and varying light needs
- **Acoustic treatment:** noise dampening throughout common spaces, a detail that matters enormously for residents with hearing sensitivities, cognitive disabilities, or those who need a quieter environment to function
- **Universally designed washrooms** distributed throughout the common areas and designed to the highest standard the certification recognizes





Accessible Features Within Every Unit — Going Beyond the Code

Building code sets a minimum for designated barrier-free units. At 275 Merton, the features below were applied across all 494 units, not just the ones the code requires. This is where the real commitment to inclusive living shows up:

- **Universal controls at accessible heights:** light switches, thermostats, and security panels mounted at 900–1,100 mm AFF, and electrical outlets at 440 mm, in every unit. Code only requires this in designated barrier-free suites; we made it the standard for everyone
- **Lever hardware on every door:** lever-style handles throughout all units as a universal standard, not limited to barrier-free suites as code would require
- **Multi-sensory entry system:** Bluetooth and card-entry locks with audible tones and red/yellow/green LED indicators on every unit door, so residents receive both sound and visual confirmation when entering their home
- **Double door viewers at two heights:** peepholes at 1,100 mm and 1,500 mm on every unit entrance, serving residents whether seated or standing
- **Grab bar blocking in all barrier-free unit bathrooms:** reinforced walls around the toilet, tub, and shower allow residents to add or relocate grab bars at any point in their tenancy, without opening walls
- **Accessible outlet adjacent to every toilet:** installed to accommodate adaptive devices
- **Front-loading laundry with audible cycle indicators:** machines accessible from a seated position
- **Accessible window hardware throughout:** operable one-handed between 400–1,200 mm AFF in all units, a standard the code does not require outside of designated suites

Barrier-Free One Bedroom Unit

Non-Barrier-Free One Bedroom Unit

1B
48.65 m²
524 ft²

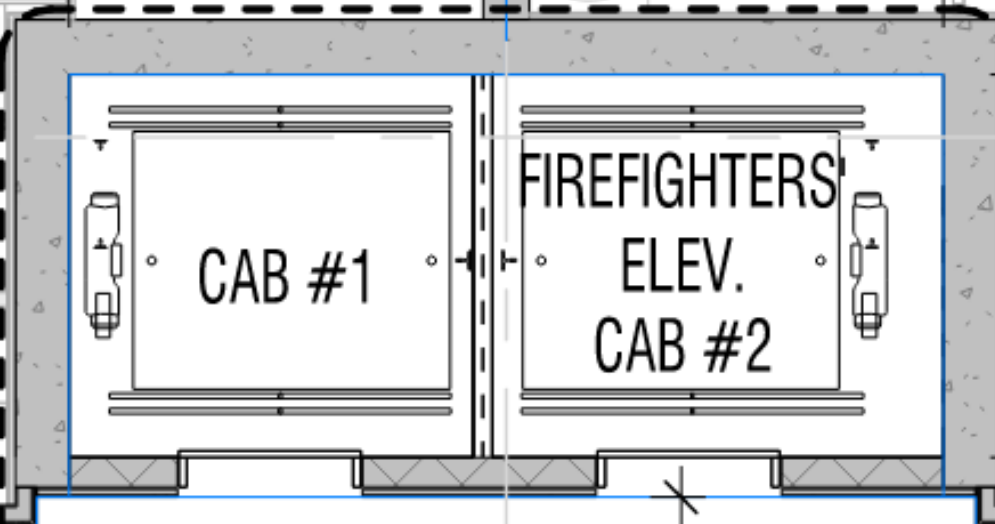
1B
48.65 m²
524 ft²

**12 AFFORDABLE 1B
UNITS (LEVEL 3-14)**

**12 AFFORDABLE 1B
UNITS (LEVEL 3-14)**

5600

8670



13

1

The Benefits and Challenges of the Menu Approach



One of the most compelling aspects of RHFAC is that it doesn't prescribe a single path to Gold. **Its menu-based structure rewards design decisions across a broad spectrum of disabilities** such as mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive, and sensory, giving design teams the flexibility to pursue meaningful accessibility in the ways that best fit the project. The result is a more holistically accessible building, rather than one that simply checks the boxes required for a wheelchair user.

However, the menu approach also surfaces the most challenging tension in residential accessibility: because **points are only awarded when features are applied consistently across all units, every design decision has to work at scale**. A feature that makes sense in a designated accessible suite becomes a much harder conversation when it has to be standard across all 494 homes.

This is where **the kitchen proved to be our most difficult to design**. Features such as lowered counter heights, knee clearance under sinks and cooktops, and accessible appliance placement are genuinely valuable for residents with mobility challenges, but when applied universally, they risk feeling unfamiliar or undesirable to the majority of renters who don't require them.

Lessons Learned



- **Start at Schematic Development, not post-permit**

We engaged our RHFAC professional within the schematic design stage to not only learn from them to inspire our design, but to avoid late changes. Changes at DD cost far less than changes post-permit or during construction.

- **Ensure you have a knowledgeable and consistent internal point of contact**

Make sure there is someone who captains the full process. Small decisions such as rounded counter corners, outlet placement, grab bar blocking, often get value-engineered out without a dedicated advocate. Someone needs to hold the line at every design and tender review.

- **It's not that hard!**

Going Beyond Code: Why It's Easier Than You Think



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Building code tells you the minimum. RHFAC Gold asks what's possible.

Accessible design isn't a constraint; it's a commitment to doing the work thoughtfully. It doesn't require a larger budget or a more complex process. It requires asking, early and often, how each decision will shape the experience of the people who will actually live there.

The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification gives developers and designers the structure to ask those questions well. It is a practical, flexible framework that translates good intentions into buildings that work for everyone, not just most people.

Your Decisions and Design Create Profound Impacts



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For Residents & Visitors

Gold-certified homes are designed for the full spectrum of human ability and the full arc of a human life. A young person recovering from surgery. A parent navigating a hallway with a stroller. A resident aging in place who wants to stay in their home on their own terms. A neighbour who is deaf, has low vision, or lives with a cognitive disability. These aren't edge cases, they are the people who will live in our buildings, and they deserve a home that was designed with them in mind from the start.

For the Business

Access to CMHC programs and premium positioning in an underserved market segment. Reduced long-term retrofit liability across the asset's lifespan.

The code is a floor. Gold is a competitive advantage.

For the City

Code sets a minimum. Developers who go beyond it are building the kind of complete community Toronto needs; inclusive, resilient, multi-generational housing that serves diverse residents for decades.

That's the kind of legacy worth building.

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