

Shift happens

Urban hubs: The new normal

The traditional Canadian home and neighbourhood are evolving

The growing population density in Toronto and its suburbs is redefining the traditional Canadian home, says Toronto architect Ian MacBurnie.

“The city is growing, the GTA is growing, and we’re fortunate that it is,” says MacBurnie, an associate professor at Ryerson University’s department of architectural science. “It’s good economically [and] obviously providing opportunities for employment in the construction sector, real estate and [other] areas.”

More and more people in Toronto and its suburbs are living in high-density, high-rise buildings. According to 2011 census data for the City of Toronto, released this past September, from 2006 to 2011 high-rise apartments increased as a proportion of all dwellings in the city, by 13 per cent. Further, over the last five years, the fastest-growing region in Canada is Toronto and its suburbs — specifically Mississauga, Brampton, Ajax, Markham

Live, work, shop, play in the same neighbourhood — this is the strength of the new plans.

CLIFFORD KORMAN ARCHITECT

and Vaughan. According to the Ontario government’s recent projections, by 2036 the population of the GTA will increase by 44.6 per cent, to about 9.2 million.

As MacBurnie points out, that means the universal desire to own a house poses a problem in the GTA, where the population continues to grow and land available for building new homes is dwindling.

In 2006, Ontario unveiled its 25-year Places to Grow program, starting with a growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe region. The initiative aims to preserve land and foster smart growth by encour-

aging municipalities to build dense, mixed-use communities close to public transit and infrastructure.

Less land and more people means the traditional notion of home will have to evolve. While single-family homes will still exist, fewer of them will be built and prices will increase. The idea of “the good life as being a house with a car in the garage and a backyard,” says MacBurnie, will need to change.

The evolution is already in progress. Fewer people are living in single-family detached homes and those homes are getting smaller. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), in 2000 the average size of a single-family, detached home in Canada was 2,266 square feet. In January 2012 a CMHC survey reported that the average new home was 1,900 sq. ft. in size, which is expected to continue decreasing.

Following this new norm are the units in high-density dwellings such as condos and apartments, which average 800 square feet. But as spaces shrink, efficiency and functionality will grow.

Developments are changing, from single-use buildings to mixed-use. “Live, work, shop, play in the same neighbourhood — this is the strength of the new plans,” says Clifford Korman, a founding partner and architect at Kirkor Architects & Planners, which is based in Toronto. “The new norm [is] putting people in core areas where you have all the existing facilities.”

High-density developments are being built in areas close to transit lines, retail centres and green space. In Toronto’s Liberty Village neighbourhood, for example, new condos under construction are mere



CORBIS

steps to a grocery store, restaurants and cafés, fitness facilities and the King West streetcar line, as well as a short drive to major highways.

This same smart development is showing up in the suburbs, where Korman says his firm is building “urban nodes,” or hubs of activity, in municipalities such as Markham. These GTA municipalities are starting to embrace smaller spaces and high-density dwellings, according to 2011 data from RealNet Canada, a real estate research firm headquartered in Toronto. Of new-home sales in Vaughan, 47 per cent were high-rises; in Markham it was 52 per cent; and in Mississauga, it was 76 per cent.

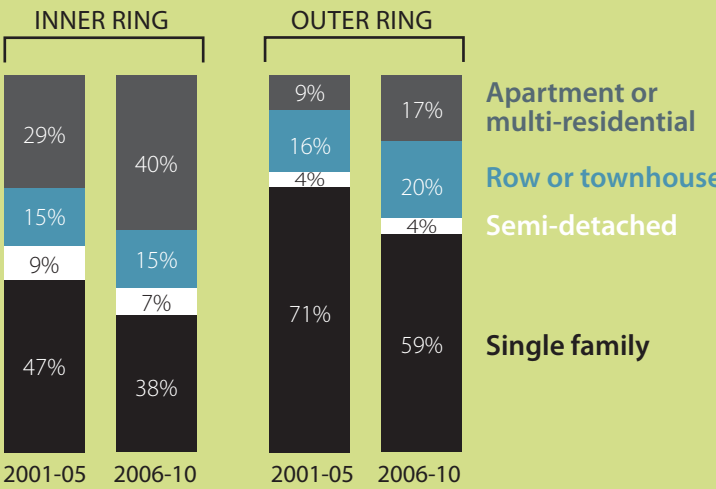
MacBurnie points to Mississauga as a good example of a municipality that has met the challenges of transitioning their community.

“Mississauga [has moved] from a post-war model of car dependents and low-density subdivisions to one that is fully embracing smart initiatives of higher-density development [and] investment in transit,” says MacBurnie.

“What you’re seeing is an evolution in thinking.”

Housing construction starts by unit type

Are things really changing? Housing construction is one indicator. Residential densities have increased in both the cities and suburbs, evident by the types of construction taking place across the Greater Golden Horseshoe.



INNER RING: Since 2006, 65 per cent of all housing units being constructed in the Census Metropolitan Areas of Toronto, Hamilton and Oshawa were apartments or town houses.

OUTER RING: Since 2006, 37 per cent of all housing units being constructed in Census Metropolitan Areas such as Barrie, Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph were apartments or town houses.

SOURCE: ONTARIO MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

Compact convenience

Young family says small space is just what they need



ROGER VIP

Sony Giwa is a 29-year old advancement officer at the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. She lives downtown with her husband and baby daughter. Their Liberty Village two-bedroom condo may not boast the same square footage as a detached home but with restaurants, shops, entertainment and public transit just steps away, space matters less.

Where did you move? To a two-bedroom condo in Liberty Village from a condo in Mississauga.

Why did you choose the neighbourhood? Liberty has everything we need. There’s a grocery store right here that’s open 24 hours; there’s an LCBO, coffee shops, restaurants.

What appealed to you? The fact that it’s in Liberty; the fact that it’s a two-bedroom. Ideally, we would have liked to have had a two-bedroom plus den just because my husband does work from home sometimes, but the two-bedroom space is big enough for us while we have a young child.

We really liked this building in particular. I liked the builders. In terms of the unit, I like that it’s a split layout — one bedroom is on one side and the master bedroom is on the other side. It also has a walk-in closet and a larger-size shower.

The finishes were done really nicely. It has the island, which has been really helpful for when we’re entertaining. Everyone tends to congregate around the island when we have people over. Space-wise and the actual layout, it seemed like it was a good use of space. We looked at some [floor plans] and they had a really long hallway or corridor — wasted space. Closet space was definitely key, and the storage unit was also a good size.

Why a condo? We really wanted to stay in the downtown area. To be able to afford a house right now is not something in our books, but a condo actually works out well for us — we don’t have time to take care of a lawn or shovel driveways in the winter. ... A condo offers us that kind of ease.

What’s next? We’re renting the place we’re in now. It was our first time living in Liberty together, so we wanted to make sure it was definitely a spot we’d want to purchase and own. There are buildings that are by Pure Plaza [Corp.]. They’re just going up right on East Liberty. They’re stunning units. We’re waiting to get into one of those units. We’re looking for the two-bedroom plus den. We’re going to see what the prices are and figure out if it makes sense to buy or rent for the next year.

This is the fourth in an eight-part series sponsored by BILD. Look for the next one on Sat., Nov. 24.



EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO INNOVATION

The land development, home building and professional renovation industry is constantly evolving as policies, building technology and marketing techniques change. BILD holds numerous educational seminars, panel discussions and training programs so that the industry can deliver the highest quality homes for residents of the GTA. So why is education so important to us?

BECAUSE THE GTA IS OUR HOME TOO