NEWHOMES

Making 'walkability' real

MARTIN SLOFSTRA
EDITOR'S NOTE

Walkability is one of those urban planning buzzwords that sounds good in theory but may leave you wondering if it is only a pipe dream.

Consider it good news that we have found two places where it exists for real — one is an established neighbourhood in downtown Toronto and the other is the Town of Whitby.

First up is Yorkville, and you can read about it on page 4, where Great Gulf is building a new condo called 8 Cumberland.

Yorkville is obviously one of the most appealing neighbourhoods in Toronto — a walker's paradise — and apparently it will get even more walkable with the arrival of 8 Cumberland "which will create a new gateway to the Yorkville District," says its developer.

When it comes to walkable communities, however, there may be nobody more ambitious in planning for it than the Town of Whitby, just east of Toronto, which I visited this past Tuesday.

There, Castle Group is developing a boutique condo project called Harbour Ten10 with occupany scheduled for 2020.

"A nice day for a walk." Seen here at Whitby's Lake Ontario waterfront with Stanley Cook, director of construction, Castle Group; Whitby Mayor Don Mitchell; and, Mona Bhamani, president, Castle Group.

The developer commits to healthy living not just in terms of its on-site amenities, but offering easy access to the area's parks and trails.

It seems only fitting then we would set out on a pleasant Tuesday morning and stroll along the boardwalk at Heydenshore Park, which runs along Lake Ontario.

Judging from our walk, Whitby's natural advantages are plain to see and this is a town with a high level of "walkability" already built in.

Joining us also is Whitby Mayor Don Mitchell, who happens to be a of 'walkability champion,' so much so, he is making it key to planning for Whitby's growth.

And so I had to ask him where he gets his inspiration from. Mitchell cites a book called *Walkable Cities* written by urban planning expert Jeff Speck, which he says he routinely hands it out to all the local builders and developers.

Walkable Cities, and a just released companion title called *Walkable City Rules: 101 Steps to Making Better Places*, is a set of practical steps that addresses everything from how to sell walkability, to making great sidewalks, to designing roads and biking lanes, and to allow for adequate parking.

And Mayor Mitchell would like nothing better than to see the priinciples of 'walkability' being applied even more, adding the next step in all this will be a series of "multi-use" paths that connect the town's north to its south, and to link all of its natural areas.

Working in Whitby's favour is the waterfront and beaches area, extending from Ajax to the west and Oshawa to the east, and completely accessible to the public.

And then there's all the other amenities. My tour also includes stops at the Lynde Shores Conservation Area, the Iroquois Park Sports Centre, and the new Cullen Central Park where pickleball and bocce ball courts, and a dog park are being added.

Also coming, I'm told, is the massive new Nordik Spa scheduled to open in the fall of 2019, which is already creating quite the buzz.

With all these developments, this a good time to think about the future — Whitby is expected to grow by 65,000 more residents in the next 20 years.

Good to see that 'walkability' is at the centre of its plans.

Building more homes would ease affordability concerns

DAVE WILKES
BILD

Last month, BILD invited experts on economics and housing to speak to our members about trends in the GTA housing market in the coming year. Much of what we heard from Patricia Arsenault of Altus Group and Dana Senagama of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) was encouraging, but it was clear there is much left to do in our region to address housing supply and affordability.

The GTA's economic conditions are expected to be solid in the short term, with the employment growth rate projected to be 1.8 per cent in 2019, according to Ms. Arsenault, who is Altus Group's Executive Vice-President, Data Solutions.

More households than last year are planning renovations of over $5,000 in the next year, and the percentage of households that currently rent but plan to buy a home in the next year has rebounded after softening last summer, according to Altus Group's survey.

Whether households can follow through on these intentions is another matter. Potential new home buyers may take longer to save for that first home in the face of new mortgage hurdles and housing affordability challenges, Ms. Arsenault noted.

The prices of condo apartments, which used to be a more affordable option than single-family homes, have been rising, reducing the price advantage of this housing type. In September, the benchmark price of new condo apartments was $789,643 and the benchmark price of new single-family homes was $1,119,533.

The supply response to the rapid price gains in both the ownership and the rental markets has been weak or inelastic, said Ms. Senagama, who is CMHC's Manager of Market Analysis. She also showed that Toronto is one of the markets in Canada that are not at the risk of overbuilding.

That's not surprising. BILD has consistently said the same thing — we are not building enough housing to accommodate the 115,000 new residents who are arriving in our region every year.

We should be building 50,000 homes every year, and last year we only built 38,000. One reason for this supply shortfall is the lengthy development process that housing projects face in the GTA, slowed down by outdated regulation and red tape.

We need to update zoning bylaws and official plans, and streamline the list of conditions for municipal approvals, so that we can build the housing our growing region needs.

That way, potential home buyers will be able to afford to make their dream of owning a home a reality.

— Dave Wilkes is President and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD). For the latest industry news and new home data, follow BILD on Twitter, @bildgta, or visit www.bildgta.ca.

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