

NEWHOMES

Downtown revitalization done right



MARTIN SLOFSTRA
EDITOR'S
NOTE

As editor of a new home section, I am fortunate to meet with a wide variety of builders, from custom home builders in smaller Ontario towns to the developers of the very largest of condo towers in downtown Toronto.

Better yet, if those meetings occur in person and in “their backyards”, as I get to see what they are all about as well as hear from them.

So, I made the trip out to Burlington last week for a casual meeting with Domenic Carnicelli of Carriage Gate Homes, a Hamilton-based builder of custom estate homes.

I admit it, I had never heard of them before, that is, until I got a call from their PR representative with a friendly invitation to come out and see them.

First things first, with 30 years in the real estate development business dating back to 1988, Carriage Gate prides

itself on its approachability and commitment to quality designs.

The builder also has an eye to future growth in the surrounding area, and at the same time, is undergoing a transition from builder of custom estate homes only to a developer of boutique-style condos.

Recent major projects include the Legacy in Ancaster (an enclave of upscale single-family luxury homes on 50', 55', 60' and 66' lots) and now under construction is The Berkeley, a 17-storey, hotel-inspired condominium in downtown Burlington. (Occupancy is slated for December 2018 with suites ranging in size from 632 sq. ft. to over 1,500 sq. ft.).

No doubt, they build beautiful homes, check out the web site at www.carriagegatehomes.com for examples of their style.

But I do get a sense from my meeting with Carnicelli that this is a builder that wants to go beyond operating “under the radar” where word-of-mouth is its



Domenic Carnicelli of Carriage Gate Homes says the true test of a downtown revitalization is that people will get to know the lifestyle and want to live there.

primary way of doing business. It wants to be heard.

Carnicelli, who will next year be president of the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association, says his goal is simply to “foster a positive message” that builders do strive to enhance the communities they build in while bringing spin-off economic benefits to the local businesses and organizations around them.

For example, in addition to the Berkeley, Carriage Gate will be launching a new yet-to-be-named “art-inspired” condominium project in downtown Burlington to be located at 421 Brant St. across from the City Hall.

The project will include a commitment to the arts and culture in Burlington with a donation to public art, and an art partnership program.

Sounds good but seeing is believing. Our meeting over lunch was followed by an impromptu tour of Burlington's downtown area and a visit to the sales office.

No doubt, this is a city that got its waterfront right and it was easy for me to see.

Along its lakefront are wide paths that are completely open to the public and are comfortably shared by bikers, pedestrians and young families with strollers, plus lots of nearby parking.

But beyond the waterfront being a “a great place to park the car and walk around,” says Carnicelli, as important is how the downtown is being revitalized and “the people who know the lifestyle really want to live here.”

Driving along Brant St, I feel there is an energy here and it's confirmed by the number of new specialty shops, restaurants and coffee shops in the area. The Village Square is now close to full occupancy and a testimony to the new life and energy that a condo can bring.

Carnicelli is promising that the Berkeley and the other condo projects will integrate with the downtown through pleasing streetscapes and common areas.

“The importance of walkability can't be overstated for the people who now live here,” he adds. Sounds like a story worth getting out.

Building condos in urban areas requires the use of traffic lanes



DAVE WILKES
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As the joke goes, we have two seasons in the GTA, winter and construction. We could do without winter, but construction is essential.

We put up with it because we know that infrastructure like roads, sewers and water mains must be built and maintained to ensure the viability of our growing cities. The same is true of new home construction.

Occasionally, large con-

struction projects, like condos in the downtown core, can take up traffic lanes and slow down drivers. Unfortunately, to keep up with the influx of the 9.7 million people who will call the GTA home by 2041 and to build to Growth Plan policy, our industry will be building high-rise buildings in urban areas that may slow down your commute.

Last month, a motion was put forth to Toronto City Council to consult with the development industry to eliminate the practice of occupying sidewalks and traffic lanes for construction.

While this might help ease

traffic congestion, it does little to help keep the cost of new homes low. If the development industry is forced to build off-site staging areas instead of using the already in place and legal City right-of-way, the extra costs will ultimately make new homes more expensive.

A construction staging area is a physical location used for the storage of equipment and materials such as vehicles and stockpiles. The City has policies to deal with this issue and the construction industry pays hundreds of thousands of dollars per project to be able to use City property for

this legally allowed and long-standing purpose.

The provincial Growth Plan calls for more intensification in urban areas where transit is available and where people work. Therefore, the City of Toronto has urban design guidelines that allow for the construction of tall buildings very close to the property line.

There is little or no room to do anything on the site and the only way to build safely is to take a public traffic lane.

Our industry is constantly looking for ways to alleviate traffic congestion by avoiding closing down lanes. We

also strive to keep costs down by side-stepping building off-site staging sites that would ultimately increase the cost of a new home or condo.

Recently, the developer of a midtown 70,000-square-foot condo was considering an underutilized park adjacent to the high-rise as an alternative to using the street.

Having to build a separate staging site at a cost of \$1,000,000 would have increased the price of a condo by \$20,000 or \$30,000. Using the street is the best way to keep the development affordable.

As the municipal elections

approach, we are encouraging voters to talk to their candidates about ways to bring to market new housing that people can afford to buy. Visit www.buildforgrowth.ca and send a message to your local council or mayoral candidate to commit to increase housing supply and affordability for the people of the GTA.

— 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.