

NEWHOMES

Is it good planning or is it good luck?



MARTIN SLOFSTRA
EDITOR'S
NOTE

This past Wednesday evening, I attended the annual dinner of the Urban Land Institute (Toronto chapter) and a curious question came up: Is the progress enjoyed by the City of Toronto the result of good planning or is it good luck?

Clearly, the mood here was upbeat. Doug Ford's announcement earlier in the day of a whopping \$28.5 billion investment in Toronto's transit system might have had something to do with it, as the proposed investment has developers and planners salivating at the possibilities.

As one of several speakers said at a panel discussion, we (urban planners) are in 'a sweet spot,' meaning Toronto is enjoying prosperous times and the possibilities are endless.

One note of caution however, came from keynote speaker Doug Saunders, author of *Maximum Canada: Why 35 Million Canadians Are Not Enough* as he thinks Toronto has been 'lucky' so far.



About 400 urban planners were in attendance at ULI Toronto's 5th annual Meet the Chiefs dinner held April 10th at the Arcadian Court on Bay St.

And given population growth projections, the city of Toronto and surrounding area will need to be more strategic and thoughtful about how it plans for development.

All that economic growth is not necessarily the result of good planning, it's just that Toronto enjoys so many natural and 'unplanned' advantages, from it being at the centre of a peace-loving nation, to its abundance of resources, a prime waterfront location, and due to wave after wave of immigration that have really helped to build and shape this city.

That 'you've been lucky so far' is probably not the best thing to be saying to a room full of urban planners, (about 400 in total), but it did spark a good discussion at my table No. 13.

For sure, there are no shortage of challenges — public transit is just one — but the consensus is that overall, Toronto is in a pretty good spot.

One area of concern, urban planners point to the phenomenon of uneven growth, and it means quite simply while some areas of Toronto are enjoying progress, other areas have declining property values and a crumbling infrastructure.



The City of Toronto is not without its challenges but is in a good place overall, says its urban planners.

Of solutions offered, one with the most potential is the creation of innovation hubs not just in Toronto but in surrounding communities.

The downtown Toronto project called Sidewalk Labs keeps up coming up for discussion, has its opponents, but will be a model for future development.

Cities to watch include Guelph, Cambridge and Hamilton — all are thriving, with plans for renewed growth not to mention a lower price of home ownership.

Have you been to Kitchener lately, asks the city's chief of planning Alain Pinard. "You may be surprised, we have \$1 billion of construction now taking place."

Also, pay close attention to Whitby and to Vaughan, two places where the local politicians and planning departments get it. It may be obvi-

ous to point out but growth occurs when quality of life and economic development go hand in hand.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is about as ambitious it gets but shows what can happen when you add mass transit to a mixed-use area and give thought to creating a vital downtown area.

And kudos to Whitby, which only just past Thursday revealed its innovation and tech hub centre called "1855 Whitby", and which officially opened its doors yesterday.

Comprised of more than a dozen tech and innovation companies employing over 500 people, the new accelerator is the first of its kind in Durham Region and should play a pivotal role in helping to increase local jobs and economic prosperity.

Good planning or good luck? I suppose it's a combination of both.

Proposed noise bylaw puts jobs, supply of homes at risk



RICHARD LYALL
RESCON

When I'm walking around downtown Toronto, I often look up at the forest of up-and-coming high-rises and smile, because I know that new condos mean more jobs and more housing supply.

But lately, I've been mystified by what's happening downtown: the City of Toronto may restrict concrete work for the construction of high-rise buildings by the private sector through amendments to the noise bylaw in an April 16 council decision.

This move, which would take effect Oct. 1, threatening more than 7,000 jobs and crippling the indus-

try's ability to deliver much needed housing supply to Torontonians.

And here's the kicker, the public at large is not even asking for this to happen, according to public opinion polling commissioned by the City's Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) department.

They found that: 66% of residents say that they do not have concerns about noise in the city but of the residents that do have concerns, only 8% specifically mentioned construction noise.

Residents are generally more understanding of "construction activities that cannot stop once they have started (for example, continuous concrete pouring)."

One of the top issues of concern for residents was housing affordability (74%).

So very few people are complaining, and the few who are will still hear construction noise from government construction work at the municipal, provincial or federal levels.

Don't get me wrong — this infrastructure work, including bridges, roads, sewers, water mains and transit, is very important. But all government work will be exempted from the noise bylaw; meanwhile, industry is asking for the current concrete work exemption to remain. That's it.

With about 100 cranes in the sky, this is a huge problem that will impact housing affordability and anticipated occupancies for up to 32,000 condo and rental units, according to City of Toronto data. Occupancies for many of these units could be delayed by the proposed noise bylaw.

But don't take it only from me. Ask Jason Ottey of the labourers' union, LiUNA Local 183 for his thoughts on how this move will impact jobs.

"The move by the City of Toronto puts over 7,000 members' jobs under threat — but this number only reflects high-rise forming," says Ottey. "There would be a snowball effect on other trades such as plumbers and electricians, whose workflow is contingent on the pace of work. If you include those trades, it's easily over 9,000 jobs."

The dialogue must continue. We have proposed the implementation of a noise management plan for each project so we can come to a resolution that balances the needs of existing and future residents.

Ottey adds: "Residential construction represents an economic engine for Toronto. In fact, Toronto leads all North

American cities in high-rise building construction because of strong demand and short supply — there's a lot on the line. That's why we strongly believe this amendment needs more thought and deliberation."

So here's what we're asking: RESCON, LiUNA Local 183, BILD and the Ontario Formwork Association urge Torontonians to contact your city councillors or MLS to tell them not to hurt jobs, housing supply and affordability by reconsidering the proposed amendments for concrete work.

There's a lot at risk: jobs, housing supply and affordability impacts everyone.

— Richard Lyall, president of RESCON, has represented the building industry in Ontario since 1991. Reach him at media@rescon.ca.