

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF DEVELOPMENT

The master-planned communities of 2010 show some similarities to their early predecessors. Don Mills, Toronto's first master-planned community, was conceived in the early 1950s, and Erin Mills, Mississauga commenced in the 1970s. However, the differences lie in the landscape in which today's communities are being brought forward through the approvals process, a very different environment than that which existed 40 and 50 years ago.

Industry Insider touched on this subject in an earlier issue which discussed supply and demand, the effect of Ontario's Places to Grow legislation. In this issue we explore some of the changes that have occurred within the development/building industry itself.

Many companies — including Geranium Corporation — have advanced from being exclusively home builders to become fully integrated development and building organizations. In the 1990s, builders began to adapt to the changing landscape within their industry, realizing that if they wanted to remain in the homebuilding business, then they had to change the way they worked. A scarcity of serviced land meant an increase in the price of lots to builders and the scales were tipping in favour of companies who owned and developed the land. It quickly became evident to several builders that it was more favourable to

expand their sphere of operation and expertise, and maintain some control over the supply chain. These entrepreneurs looked beyond the GTA to Durham, Simcoe, Halton and elsewhere to assemble land. Throughout this decade, they became proficient at planning mixed-use, master-planned communities encompassing large tracts of land. These re-tooled companies now design and build viable, desirable “live, work, play” environments for our growing population.

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With the introduction of legislation that protects green space and determines areas of intensification, communities today offer a different, and in my view, a better quality of life than those completed many years ago.

Changes which affect accepted planning principles have also occurred,

although against a longer timeline. The traditional bedroom suburbs of the post-war years were built to provide affordable, low-rise residential housing for families who wanted to live beyond the congestion of the city. Today these have given rise to more sophisticated satellite communities. Surrounding Toronto today we see self-sufficient concentrations of residential development with employment centres, and commercial and industrial land served by a public transit system and accessed by major transportation routes. The competing priorities of building sustainable communities are a huge challenge. Companies with the experience to successfully navigate the planning process, and the capacity to finance the development over an extended time period, have a vested interest in building the community and are better equipped to meet these new challenges.

New master-planned communities have been designed with a cohesive, strategic planning approach when compared to a typical residential subdivision. There are many good examples in downtown Toronto as well as in the outlying areas of the city. New home seekers would be well advised to look at these when considering their future home purchase. ■

Boaz Feiner is Vice President, Housing Division for Geranium Corporation