

A LAND PLANNING PERSPECTIVE



Our company is one of Ontario's few fully integrated land development and home building companies, which benefits our homebuyers for reasons which are often not apparent.

I spoke with Executive Vice President of Geranium Corporation Cheryl Shindruk to shed light onto the role that development plays. Shindruk has a Masters degree in City Planning and, following a period in the public sector, worked with a consulting company on planning policy, land use and development approvals. She joined Geranium in 2003, excited by the entrepreneurial spirit of a progressive development and home building company.

"I was drawn to the planning profession because it offered the opportunity to be involved in the earliest stages of

community building. Communities are organic entities that evolve and change over time. To be a part of the process that affects us all every single day, and to create places for people that are enticing, functional and attractive, still fascinates me," says Shindruk.

How does this benefit the people that ultimately end up buying a Geranium Home? "Through having greater control over the design of the overall community, we can ensure that we are planning for, and ultimately building, homes that are desirable. A master-planning approach also adds value because the result is a place that looks, feels and functions well."

Shindruk's development team is involved at the outset; they make an assessment of the development potential by taking into account an extensive range of physical, social and economic factors. These considerations include, for example, existing landform features and proximity to community amenities. They would assess the current capacity of infrastructure and costs to

service the land. Hydro geological conditions, archaeological and cultural heritage features of significance to the site would also impact a decision to move forward. All of the above is in the context of what the company believes the market will support.

When company criteria have been met, then the team moves ahead with a formal plan submission. Shindruk says, "Our plan will preserve existing desirable features as well as include design elements that will give value to the residents of the new community." The submission contains engineering reports, methods of preservation and protection, how the plan meets the policy objectives of the official plan, land uses, road sizes, lot sizes, urban design character and architectural control (this gives the approval authority assurance of how the community will look upon completion), archaeology reports and a transportation assessment for a transportation strategy. If a commercial component is included, often an analysis may be required to demonstrate the need.

There are various public consultations along the way. As a matter of course, the plan submission is circulated to many different departments within a municipality, and often to ministry departments for conformity with policies and regulations. Following which municipal staff prepares a report with their recommendations that goes to Council, and Council decides whether to approve or not. Under some circumstances, Council decisions may be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. "We believe that our approach has been successful because it includes a comprehensive and inclusive consultation process," says Shindruk.

"Everything you see on the ground has been the function of an extensive process, which is many years in the making. When you think about it, what we do is pretty fundamental and foundational in people's lives. That's exciting!" ■

Boaz Feiner is President, Housing Division for Geranium Corporation.

This article is the 13th to appear in HOMES Magazine. Previously published articles can be viewed at geraniumhomes.com.