# **Shift happens**

# Sharing a vision for a new city

What happens when your neighbourhood has development potential?

any GTA residents may not know that they have the power to help shape new developments in their neighbourhoods.

Whether it's for a proposed transit line or redevelopment of pockets ripe for revitalization, there are opportunities to get involved in the planning process.

In fact, becoming informed about the process of planning is key, says the City of Toronto's chief planner, Jennifer Keesmaat.

"There needs to be room for movement...[and] room for change, and the planning process can facilitate those conversations."

For every development application, the provincial Planning Act sets out rules for holding public meetings to discuss the proposed vision. BILD's president and CEO, Bryan Tuckey, says the public meetings to discuss proposed developments are beneficial when participants "come with an open mind to listen and learn."

"Developers and builders bring their teams of experts to explain the vision so that the local councillor and the local residents understand how it came to be," he explains.

Municipalities, of course, also play a big role in the planning process. They are required by the Province of Ontario to direct a minimum of 40 per cent of their projected population and employment growth to areas that are already developed.

This means that established communities like Mississauga City Centre, the village of Unionville and areas along the Yonge St. corridor, to name just a few, are mandated for change.

This requirement, among others, including promoting transitoriented and balancing jobs and housing, are then incorporated into regional and municipal official plans and zoning bylaws. With these documents it is clear when, where and how development takes place.

Developers like Martin Blake, vicepresident of Toronto-based The Daniels Corp., recognize the importance of having the intensification rules in place, clearly and consis-

"I believe that consistency helps



Harry Eaglesham, who lives in Markham, has been working with the city's planners and developers: "I'm doing my share to deliver the dream for others."

# A man with a plan

### Big change in neighbourhood 'not necessarily for the worse,' says Unionville resident

Markham resident Harry Eaglesham jokingly describes himself as "Mr. Suburbia": he became involved in local planning issues about 20 years ago. That was when the Town of Markham (now a city) began consulting with residents on proposed plans to build new communities that would be more compact, mixed-use and transit-oriented. It was an unconventional suburban development approach at the time — and long before Ontario's Places to Grow initiative was introduced in 2006.

Eaglesham, a 64-year-old retired IT professional, lives in a century home on historic Main Street, in the heart of Markham's idyllic village of Unionville. He's also on the board and a past president of the influential Unionville Ratepayers Association

Growth in the area is increasingly being redirected, notes Eaglesham, from farmland and toward Markham's existing communities. "The character of existing neighbourhoods is changing dramatically," he says, "and not necessarily for the worse." A large part of that urban intensification is apparent just south of Unionville and across Highway 7, within Markham Centre — the

city's purpose-built "downtown," conceived in the mid-1990s by American architect and planner Andrés Duany.

"There are widely held concerns that bringing lower-priced condos into the community will have a negative impact on property values and negative societal impacts," says Eaglesham. "Of course, history has shown that property values are going up."

His biggest concern about intensification is the gap between development approvals and the construction of the infrastructure required to support it. "Here we are in Markham, where intensification is going gangbusters," he says, "and infrastructure, specifically transportation, is going at glacial speed.

"I would love to move to the Markham Centre of the vision of 20 years ago, but it's not available to me. It's not built yet."The "work-play" options that accompany "live," he explains, have not yet arrived.

For now, he's staying put but will continue working with the city's planners and developers through his involvement with the local ratepayers group. Says Eaglesham, "I'm doing my share to deliver the dream for others."

to level the playing field and allows home to thousands across the GTA. residents, developers, municipal planning staff, councillors everyone — to understand where laws that haven't been updated for tently established, so that everyone things are going and what the ultican move forward in a positive way. mate goal is," says Blake, whose tion breaks down. company's residential towers are

Building for the millennium

doesn't always match outdated bydecades. Sometimes communica-

There have been cases when town

or city staff endorse an application, but council denies it. If a development application isn't endorsed by both, the land owner has the right to appeal the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board, which removes local political pressure and renders decisions in accordance with the Planning Act.

Sometimes, it is the residents and planners who disagree. "The very first and highest priority for city planners is to represent the public interest," says Keesmaat.

But, as she points out, making a recommendation in the public interest sometimes means that a municipal planner and the neighbourhood may disagree on a particular issue because the planner also represents the much broader community interest. Public transit is one such issue that needs to be better understood in a larger context.

Blake stresses the importance of community consultation and support before proceeding with intensification. "We spend our time with the community to understand its hopes and goals before we go forward to present a project," he says.

Ultimately, the aim is to develop a proposal so compelling that people from the community will, literally, buy into it.

'When you think about people who are going to be your end-users — the people who will live in

those buildings — you want them to be from the community," says Blake. One of the key outcomes of intensification is to create opportunities for residents to live in a community their whole lives as their needs change.

Some issues, including intensification, can create a divide between local resident aspirations and the bigger planning picture for the community, but Keesmaat is optimistic.

"If it's a good process, you learn something and you think differently at the end," she says.

After all, she says, decisions on how to invest in a sustainable city and improve quality of life are made best when people come together with the entire city in mind.

This is the second in an 8-part series sponsored by BILD. Look for the next one on Sat., Nov. 10.







### **LISTEN AND LEARN**

Residents can help shape the look and feel of new developments by becoming involved in the planning process. All development projects follow rules and regulations set out by various levels of government, from the proposal stage right through to the actual building

The planning process in Ontario provides an open public forum that is dependent on your awareness of and engagement with local issues.

To learn more, check out these resources.

- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) mah.gov.on.ca
- Places to Grow placestogrow.ca
- Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) omb.gov.on.ca

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

### **Planning act**

Sets out the ground rules for land use planning in municipalities across Ontario

# **Provincial policy statement**

Sets out broad policy directions on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development

#### Greenbelt plan | Growth plan Identifies where urbanization should not occur | for the Greater Golden

Horseshoe with a focus on sustainable development and transportation Official plans

# Sets out general policies for how lands are used today and for the next 25 years

Secondary plans More specific policies for a particular neighbourhood or district

#### **Precinct/block plans** Assist in the implementation official and secondary plans

**Zoning bylaws** Establishes specific criteria for lot sizes and dimensions, etc.

Subdivision Required to divide a piece of land into more than two parcels or properties

# Site plan

Used to regulate and refine aspects of building site, such as landscaping and building materials

### **Permits**

Allow construction once all requirements have been satisfied

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