

Condos in the ‘burbs

by **barbara lawlor**

When it comes to ideal places to live, it’s hard to beat the Greater Toronto Area. We have a wonderful assortment of residential choices, from the urban excitement of Toronto itself to the wonderful municipalities that surround it. The rich complement of beautiful settings and tremendous amenities makes for residential options that fit just about any lifestyle – which is why the population of the GTA is booming, and is expected to increase by millions over the next three decades.

As Toronto grew over the past few years, more people moved to the suburbs, which has brought its own set of challenges with traffic and greenhouse gas emissions from so many commuters. To accommodate the increasing population and hopefully lessen the environmental impact of this migration, in 2005 Ontario established the “Places to Grow Act.” This Act calls for a substantial portion of new residences to be built closer to traffic nodes and amenities to increase density and help avoid urban sprawl. Both in Toronto and its surrounding areas, the logical solution was to build “up” rather than “out,” and condominiums began to come into their own.

Today, there is a demand for condos in the 905 area, and master-planned communities are popping up from Pickering to Oakville. Municipalities such as Whitby, Ajax, Markham, Aurora, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Brampton and Mississauga are far from strictly bedroom communities anymore. These towns and cities are now self-sufficient urban centres with plenty of employment options for those who

do not want to deal with rush hour for hours on end. There are, of course, some people who commute to Toronto from these areas, and many condos in the 905 are located close to GO Transit. In Markham, Mississauga and Vaughan, for example, major urban centres are being developed based on the principles of Smart Growth and New Urbanism, and residential condominiums are part of the master-planned mix.

Condominiums in the suburbs offer a refreshing alternative for people of all ages who want the benefits of no-maintenance living, plus the less-hecktic pace and access to family amenities they find around Toronto. For empty nesters, condominiums in the 905 area enable them to live in neighbourhoods they already know and love, near where they raised their own families, and where their children may be raising theirs.

Young professionals and couples buying their first homes find condominiums more affordable than low-rise homes, and the prices are usually lower the farther they get from the Toronto city core. We also have a huge demand for condominiums from immigrants who come here from foreign cities where apartment-style living is the norm. Many of these homebuyers are not looking for a place with a lawn and a large driveway to maintain, so a condo suite is the perfect choice.

Families are also opting for the condominium lifestyle. Choosing one of the 905 municipalities means they may find larger suites that are in a price range they can afford. It offers them the opportunity to raise their children in family-friendly neighbourhoods – and to spend more time with the kids

because they have fewer “chores” than they would in a low-rise home. They, along with purchasers of all ages, appreciate the convenience and security of living in a condominium building that is close to shopping, parks, schools and major transportation routes. Plus, properties in the suburbs often offer condominium developers more space to place the buildings on, which in turn creates more of a “neighbourhood” feel.

An aging population, skyrocketing low-rise home prices, hectic lifestyles that allow for little leisure time, and the ever-expanding GTA population contribute to wisdom of investing in a 905-area condominium. These suites are likely to increase in demand and in value.

Maintenance-free living away from the city – you can have your condominium cake and eat it too, in the ‘burbs!



Barbara Lawlor is President of Baker Real Estate Incorporated, and an in-demand columnist and speaker. A member of the Baker team since 1993, she oversees the marketing and sales of condominium developments in the GTA and overseas developments in the GTA and overseas.