Understanding Toronto's mid-rise condo revolution


Bellefair mid-rise condo in the beaches. HANDOUT

Condo trends.
'People are looking for an alternative to high-rise living'

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When you think about Toronto's red hot condo boom, what likely comes to mind is skyscraper point towers and cranes against the sky.

But the rapid proliferation of mid-rise condo developments is becoming a new trend in GTA real estate. You see them sprouting up all across the city and beyond, and for condo buyers, they have several advantages.

So what constitutes a mid-rise? The city of Toronto classifies them as a building having between four and 12 storeys.

Shane Fenton is the VP of Reserve Properties that specializes in creating boutique mid-rise designs in established neighbourhoods.

He says they have much less impact on the infrastructure of an existing neighbourhood as opposed to a 40-storey tower.

"It's a modest sense of intensification, where as opposed to going in with a massive project, the great thing about mid-rise development is it allows you to intensify the city of Toronto on a piece-by-piece basis in a very modest standpoint."

Over the last five to 10 years, if you've wanted to live in a condominium you'd have to relocate to a different part of town.

Compared to high-rises, mid-rise condos are more readily constructed in existing, established neighbourhoods. This allows empty-nesters or their children to purchase housing close to the neighbourhood that they know or were raised in.

"What we're seeing now is an advent or demand from people to want to be closer. They want to have an alternative form of housing style but they still want to be closer to the neighbourhood that they've grown up (in) and that they're connected to where their friends and family are located," says Fenton.

Roland Rom Colthoff agrees.

"I think people are looking for an alternative to high-rise living, so they're looking for a building that fits into the existing neighborhoods that they understand and know and want to be part of, for the shopping reasons, or lifestyle or near a school or whatever it is. And there's relatively limited areas where you can put the new towers."

As an architect and director of RAW Design, Colthoff is no stranger to designing mid-rises in Toronto.

"We have 109 Ossington, we have the Lakehouse and Bellefair in the beaches, we have one called Beach Hill at Woodbine and Gerrard, we have one called Howard Park that just got approved by city council today, out at Roncensvalles and Dundas, and we're looking further afield up to Eglinton and St. Clair. So they've largely been clustered downtown but are spreading out more as people understand the concept better."

Dealing with dangerous asbestos

I recently purchased an existing house and shortly after closing there was a short circuit in the basement that caused a small fire.

When my insurance adjuster came to settle my claim, he indicated that due to the age of the house, they would have to test the walls for asbestos before they effected repairs.

In doing so, they discovered that there was asbestos in my basement and now I have a huge job to remediate the area with a special and quite costly team. What can I do about this?



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The first area to look into is what is covered by your insurance.

I have made enquiries and asbestos removal is generally not covered under home insurance policies.

Presumably, you also purchased title insurance when you bought the house. In speaking with my title insurance underwriter, asbestos would be considered an environmental exclusion and therefore not covered.

The final plan of action would be to determine if the vendor knew about the asbestos and did not disclose it before the sale.

I contacted my questioner and he indicated that he thought the vendor who was an elderly woman probably had no idea of the problem.

Conversely, now that the purchaser has knowledge of the problem, they must disclose the issue and the removal of asbestos to any potential buyer. Which unfortunately leads me to the conclusion that the purchaser will have to pay for the asbestos remediation himself.

There is no way that this could have been detected by a home inspector if it was in the walls of the basement. This is just one of the problems of buying an old home.

A further note is that the homeowner should engage a reputable firm who will properly document the removal so the homeowner has proof in the future.

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