
Developers catch the 'reurbanize' buzz; Brownstones join movement to slow sprawl, revitalize old neighbourhoods; [Final Edition]

TERRY PENDER. *The Record*. Kitchener, Ont.: May 5, 2005. pg. B.3

Full Text (596 words)

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Chris McNabb and his partner Lee Brubacher are among a growing number of developers bringing new life to older neighbourhoods.

Their company, King Street Holdings, is in the midst of the latest residential re-development of property along the downtown stretch of King Street. At the corner of Betzner and King streets they are constructing a Brownstone style building that will hold 27 high-end apartments.

Among urban planners, politicians and environmentalists the buzz words these days include infilling, reurbanization and intensification -- in other words, building new housing in existing neighbourhoods.

The whole idea is to slow the pace of urban sprawl and, among other benefits, reduce traffic congestion and air pollution as fewer people drive in from the suburbs.

"Infill is really where all municipalities are going to have to move before too long, and the development land in this town is pretty much held by a few people," said McNabb.

Paying a large amount of money for lots on the edge of the city, and then trying to compete against the big builders is not too appealing to McNabb.

"We can be a little creative and try to improve our inner city, which I love. I personally think living in the core is great," said McNabb.

The Betzner Brownstones will range in size from 59 square metres (650 square feet) to 130 square metres (1,450 square feet). Rents will range from \$750 to \$1,500 a month. The units will have nine-foot ceilings, hardwood floors, porcelain tile floors in the bathrooms and maple cupboards.

"We are very proud of it. I think it's going to be a show piece, something very different in town," said McNabb.

In addition to the Betzner Brownstones, hundreds of residential units will be added to central Kitchener with the construction of the Kaufman Lofts, the Eaton's Lofts, the Arrow Lofts, the Mansion Lofts and a highrise apartment building slated for Queen Street South near the Iron Horse Trail.

"There definitely is a movement happening," said Peter Walberg, a principal planner with Waterloo Region.

He's one of the organizers of a conference called "rethink, reinvent, reurbanize: seizing opportunity in urban development." David Caplan, the provincial minister for infrastructure renewal, and Paul Bedford, Toronto's retired chief planner, are among the keynote speakers.

"The reason we are doing the conference is to try to get the word out to the broader development industry that there are opportunities in reurbanization," said Walberg.

Waterloo Region, the three cities and the home builders' association partnered to organize and stage the conference, which will be at the Walper Hotel, June 22 to 23.

In the coming months the province is expected to pass legislation that will require all municipalities to have 40 per cent of development occur within existing neighbourhoods.

This will require a massive change for most developers and municipal governments, which have done little but allow suburbs to sprawl over farmland.

Walberg believes that 18 to 25 per cent of new development in Waterloo Region now occurs in built-up areas. That's a far cry from the provincial objectives.

"We are very early on in the process. Once we take a look at some financial incentives that can be put in place, and get past some of the misconceptions in the community about what we are trying to achieve, I think you are going to see that number creep up steadily," said Walberg.

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[Illustration]

Photo: DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF / Lee Brubacher (left) and Chris McNabb stand in front of the Betzner Brownstones property they are developing in downtown Kitchener, yesterday.

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