

### General Statement

We are conditioned to accept without question that development is an absolute necessity for all aspects of our society. It represents change. And resistance to change is not only counter productive, but also ultimately futile. Is this then the fate awaiting the growing condo dwellers in general?

The better heeled condominium dwellers embrace this newer style of living early on. For those who can afford it, they move on to newer units at given time intervals – keeping well ahead of the crowd that follows. They, as early adopters, quickly realize that the modern buildings are fashioned from materials and technology that are not time tested against the unusually harsh Canadian weather. And the chances of living in a dwelling next to impossible to maintain or repairs after only one or two decades are very real. Hence the term “throw away glass towers” coined by Toronto Star journalists.

Another matter of concern is on the durability of concrete cement. When the ceilings of several vehicular tunnels had collapsed in Quebec and Japan, a university professor observed that the life expectancy of concrete is only about 46 years. Thus we are faced with the daunting task down the road of demolition and providing landfill for these towers.

### The Hard Realities of Towers and Condos

The First Canadian Place underwent a complete exterior makeover after two decades, replacing all the vaunted Italian marble panels with glass. The whispered price tag is said to be around \$300 million. While big banks and financial institutions may be capable of footing the hefty bill, seniors and retirees are definitely not among the moneyed few that qualify for similar feats.

Moreover, after fifty plus years, the rules and regulations governing condominiums are not quite there yet – for the protection of condominium owners. I live in a condominium which gets a different management company almost every other year, if things have not gone sour within the very first year. With a significant number of initial owners from real estate, architecture, and building trade backgrounds, our combined expertise still fell way short of dealing satisfactorily with the issues on moving in (by late 1999) and getting registered as a condo in the midst of Toronto Metro Amalgamation chaos. We found ourselves spending an inordinate sum on consulting fees annually in the first five or six years. It did little good, since the laws were rather vague.

Our low rise 12-floor building on 39 Parliament Street, directly across from Parliament Square Park, was the second newer construction on Distillery District to be completed. Today the area is dominated by three towers, two zooming up to 44 floors, one at 33 floors but shapes like a battle ax with the sharp edge pointing aggressively outwards at the Old Parliament Site. The proposal to add more tall buildings within the confined area makes good financial and aesthetics sense, so long as the designer-architects do not need to live there themselves.

## *How About Surviving the Canadian Environment*

Consumers show a preference for chickens which have ranged freely rather than chickens raised in cages. We have seen the crowded conditions birds live under, even at the best run chicken farms. When an epidemic strikes, the government of the Special Administrative Region in Hongkong, tends to cull the entire chicken population, rather than leaving things to chance. At the Distillery District we are beginning to see that we are treating ourselves in parallel to what our agricultural industry treats our food sources. Somehow we have to rein in our desire for efficiency and stop packing in more people.

Newcomers as well as long time residents recognize the importance of housing/shelter in Canada. We need housing to survive Canadian winters, and those who are not sheltered must come to the emergency warming stations or risk adding to the death by exposure statistics. And Margaret Atwood writing about Canada recognizes that it is a matter of survival against the elements.

The great talents behind the Distillery District development drive should be more at home in Shanghai, where the city skyline change may surpass a weekly frequency. Historically we play only second fiddle to New York City, which has been now unquestionably outclassed by Shanghai. Toronto is where we live, not where we only come to work. It has not yet caught on with 24/7 mode of existence. Try as hard as they may to stay open longer hours, the retail shops in the Pathway underground are alive only when the commuters come in to work. We do not have the same kind of population base to support round the clock pedestrian traffic. The aspirations of investors, for example, to create a Toronto Eaton Centre Annex on Mill Street, or even a Disney flavoured attraction east of Union Station may fall way short. Instead we would have to put up with annual major inconvenience during the Christmas Mart as it is.

## *How Have I Chosen to Live Here*

I advocate for public housing. And I stayed in government subsidized housing for ten years (six years with Ontario Housing Authority, four years with Cityhome) until it became obvious that at various levels our governments were opting out of providing housing altogether. Earlier I have experienced: living with a relative, renting a room in a semi detached house, living at a private rooming house, cohabiting with two roommates, and living in a small apartment (next door to an elderly couple).

Home ownership is not for everybody. There are people who cannot handle a screw driver and who also do not want to attempt any Do-It-Yourself task in the house. My investment in doing simple plumbing work myself reached over \$500 in replacement parts and tools. I had no clue what I was looking for when I first visited the nearest Home Hardware Store.

The shop sales staff steered me to more expensive plumbing suppliers before I realized that the parts I wanted come under the Delta brand. Then the bad news is that Delta discontinues their older lines and wants to promote newer products. And after more than ten years living in the condo, most of the Delta products are no longer in the vogue. This may not always work out well for consumers. First, I need to stock up on hard to find parts in preparation for future emergencies and shortages. Then at a student residence at Dalhousie University the Delta sensor controlled toilet flush goes off at the slightest movement on the toilet seat -- severely interfering the business at hand.

Living in a condominium is not my first choice. But faced with a history of moving from dwelling to dwelling, I had little choice but to secure a living space, from where I may not be that easily dislodged after retirement. I acquired the smallest unit I could find in the building. I'd bite the bullet and paid off the mortgage within 18 months. Then I did not count on having the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation to evaluate my living space of 391 square feet upward from \$68,000 (1999) move-in price to beyond \$200,000 (2017) price. Their assessment process can be rather arbitrary, because from the beginning (2000) their evaluation price was already at \$90,000.

Canada is spacious. In Toronto we behave as if we are in Hongkong, and getting progressively crowded in. We do need to ask ourselves why, and how come we have allowed things to get so dire with developers.

Respectfully submitted,

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