

The *newest* New Urbanism

Suburban neighborhoods tweaked to recall old residential streets have become a new urbanist commonplace among more enlightened North American urban markets. Nobody says New Urbanism is immutable, including the high priest of that popular trend. Canadian developers would agree.

By Albert Warson

Architect/master planner Andres Duany, often called the father of New Urbanism, seems to have become less doctrinaire in his crusade against the kind of conventional suburban development that begets sprawl.

"There is no contradiction between new urbanism and modernism, including a modernist 16-storey apartment building," he told a recent conference in Toronto, hosted by the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), San Francisco, and Urban Land Institute (ULI), Washington, D.C.

Duany mocked the typical marketing image of a New Urbanism village as quaint, white-picketed single-family housing. That, he says, does a disservice to the movement's credo of mixed incomes and housing types, service/retail and low-rise office — urban looking at the core and suburban at the edge.

"There is no single way of doing things," he continued, whether, for example, signage in the community commercial centre is discreetly small or in blazing neon. "Everything is correct. A new urbanist becomes an allocator who doesn't have to say ban this or ban that, who isn't against some types of vegetation because they aren't native species, or who hates light pollution because it obscures the brilliance of stars."

"Don't try to have a single building code but rather clean up the existing code, which is suburban sprawl junk to the core, then leave it intact," he advised, and work toward a "parallel track" that governs "smart growth" and its New Urbanism cousin. "Let the market decide."

What's your pleasure?

Where does all this place his firm? "I'm just asking people what they want," he says, sounding like he may be tired of sparring with public works engineers and fire marshals over

building code technicalities, championing his own cause, or maybe he's just more mellow.

His Miami-based firm, Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. (DPZ) will design a modernist home, or any other kind of home, as long as it suits a basic New Urbanism setting. A house doesn't have to be tricked out in the gingerbread, gables, pitched roof and board-and-batten kinds of trappings of 19th or early 20th century style houses, although it is still the favoured look. "In Los Angeles, New York and Miami Beach, clients want modernist, rather than traditional architecture for their homes. In most other places they want traditional, so what can you do," he mused.

Versatility of another kind is personified by DPZ's master planning and residential design at Windsor, a community for the super-rich on Florida's Atlantic coast, developed by Canada's supermarket and bakery billionaire Galen Weston, and design of housing for migrant agricultural workers at the southern end of the state. He said Windsor proves the notion that "money can buy good design."

Duany recalled a project where clients were horrified at a rendering of a proposed modernist-style apartment building, but loved it re-rendered in a Georgian style. Although his firm is on the New Urbanism front lines, he isn't blind to the realities of what at least two thirds of the home buying market wants. "Never, ever eliminate conventional suburbia from the options because there is a market for streets with cul-de-sacs and driving everywhere," he said.

Conventional suburbia in fact borders virtually every New Urbanism community Duany's firm has master planned, such as Cornell Village in Markham, Oak Park, the Village of Morrison in Oakville, and the Village at Niagara-on-the-Lake, all in Ontario, and McKenzie Towne in Calgary.

Cornell still the best

Duany still regards the Cornell plan as the best of his firm's more than 150 such projects world-wide. "It is an absolute classic, the model for our development guidelines book and all our projects," he says.

But he hadn't seen it since 1994, when his firm planned the 2,421-acre site for the Ontario government, which then sold it to Law Development Group. The chemistry between Duany and Larry Law, also an architect, wasn't great, and as he put, with characteristic whimsy: "I quit after an hour and a half, and that included the trip to the airport."

He went to Cornell after the CNU/ULI conference in April to see what Law had wrought. Jeff Speck, DPZ's



called a typical "golf course community."

Patrick O'Hanlon, president of Kylemore Homes/Angus Glen Development Limited, and incumbent Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association president, says the company has built about 400 units at Angus Glen so far.

Glossy pictures and reality

Sales, he noted, "went very well at the beginning, four years ago, then slowed down during construction because you're no longer selling off glossy pictures. People would say 'look how close the houses are together' or 'I didn't think the houses would be that close to the street' or

'if it's a laneway community, how do the garages work?'"

"Now the dream is taking shape. Trees, vegetation and the streetscape are visible and sales have taken off again. Property values have increased 30 to 40 per cent," O'Hanlon said.

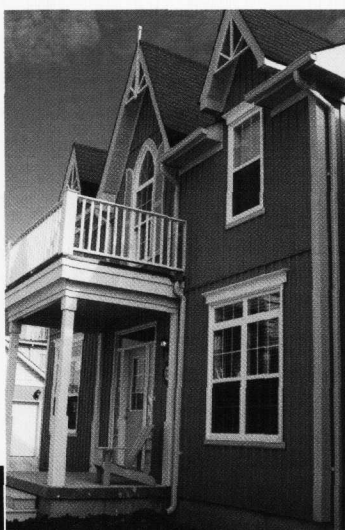
Steve Futton, vice-president, PMA Brethour Real Estate Corporation, Toronto, which tracks new home sales in the Greater Toronto Area, says New Urbanism is an increasingly popular housing form. So too are "wide-shallow" lots for conventional suburban housing but built close to the street, with garages at the side or rear.

New urbanist-style front porches are a great selling feature, and second floor

director of town planning, reports Duany was basically satisfied with the way the 1,100 single-family and townhomes and three-storey, 48 apartments/20,000 square foot central retail square development is evolving.

However, he was disappointed, Speck says, that some of the porches are four feet deep, rather than six feet as recommended. What's more, some rear alleys are too exposed and privacy is therefore diminished. Some of the houses are not well built. Some of the neo-traditional details are overdone, or done poorly.

A few miles away at Angus Glen, a more upscale new urbanist community than Cornell, which Jenkins & Associates, Calgary, and The Planning Partnership, Toronto, master planned, has completed its first phase. It borders an 18-hole championship course where the Canadian Open will be played next year, as well as another golf course, although it couldn't be



Top left: Typical streetscape and commercial centre with apartments at Cornell, Markham, Ont. Bottom left: Toronto's chief planner Paul Bedford and Andres Duany. Middle: typical new urbanist home at Angus Glen, Markham, and bottom right, walking tour of Angus Glen by CNU/ULI conference registrants.

Photos by Albert Warson.



porches even more so, he says. "After so many years where products tend to look the same from one community to another and most of the attention has been paid to the interior," Futton added, "buyers are wondering why they don't move into a more interesting looking house."

As for McKenzie Towne, Duany admires the way it has evolved, except for a three to five-lane collector road with no saleable frontage through the middle of the project, which he hadn't recommended. "It wasn't needed, shows a failure of confidence in the plan and disrupts the street grid system," he added.

(The developer and Duany's client, Carma Corporation, Calgary, has been building about 100 single-family homes a year at McKenzie Towne since 1995, according to John Olson, Carma's senior vice-president, housing/land division. That tops any other builder's volume in Calgary, he says. Rear garages are widely popular across the municipality, which is a marketing advantage. Together with another four builders they have built about 1,000 single family homes, townhouses and apartments at the New Urbanist town and Olson figures it will be built out within seven years. A supermarket, shops, pub, bank and community centre have been built in the town square, giving it the urban core that invariably follows in the wake of the housing, but much later.)

When asked in an interview at the CNU/ULI conference in Toronto if there are differences, however subtle, between the manifestation of New Urbanism in Canada and the United States, he replied: "Canada has the advantage of making mistakes later (after they are made in the U.S.) and for shorter periods.

"Municipalities are more powerful in Canada, they tell citizens what to do, to much greater extent than in the United States," he replied. Nor would the mayor of a U.S. city have emulated Markham's mayor, who gave the CNU/ULI conference registrants an unabashedly effusive account of how he and his administration embraced New Urbanism and carried the town along with them.

The live/work home market

Duany makes much of flexibility in housing, including one of his recent live/work home designs. What does he think of the affordable, compact but modular, single family "Grow Home" designed by McGill University's School of Affordable Housing associate professor Avi Friedman?

"That's about a minimum and looks poor. Americans intrinsically want more. They may have a unit of the same size, but they try hard to make it look bigger." The familiar characterization of typical Canadian modesty and American flamboyance, it seems, is demonstrable in the average residential neighborhood. ■

Neo-traditionalism on the Chattahoochee

New Urbanism was surprisingly late gravitating to Atlanta's booming and often experimental housing market, but it has arrived, in a somewhat different form.

Neo-traditionalism, as it's also called, doesn't conjure up images of office buildings, but there is no reason why they should be excluded. Post Properties, Inc., a local real estate investment trust (REIT) and one of the largest developers/owners/managers of multi-family apartment communities in the United States, has built the first neo-traditional town in Atlanta.

The REIT also moved its head office into an eight-storey building, which dominates the four-storey office, retail and apartment buildings in the main square.

"Upscale" apartments — one bedroom, one bath, 830 square feet — rent from \$1,050 a month in the square near the basic single-family housing neighborhood at Post Riverside. (Most of the company's communities names begin with "Post," which the company says are "high-quality, high-density, live-work-walk neighborhoods in infill locations in major



Downtown Port Riverside, Atlanta, GA., a new form of mid-rise office developments in a new urbanist town. Courtesy DPZ, Miami.

urban markets across the country").

The master plan, by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. (DPZ), Miami, incorporates more medium-rise buildings than is usually found in other neo-traditional communities, notably the REIT's head office building.

Not everybody who lives in Post Riverside works in the offices, but for those who do, they can walk to work in a few minutes, which is consistent with one of New Urbanism's main themes of far less dependency on cars, much shorter commutes, reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.

Jeff Speck, DPZ's director of town planning, says the 50-acre site was a difficult one to build on, with only about 60 per cent of it available for development and a steep slope down to the Chattahoochee River.

Post Properties had planned three separate "pods" — an apartment community, townhouses and services/retail, but DPZ persuaded them to combine them all into a single development. Most of the demand, he says, was for proximity to the town centre.