

SUBURBS: North-end developer committed to new urban concept

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"I think trying some of these things are risky, but I think it is worthwhile because we have to move ahead with housing designs," Zaifman says. "We don't want to do the same old, same old, over and over again."

At the other end of London, developer Peter Sergautis hopes to have the shovels in the ground a year from now on a subdivision that would put a bit of Old North and Wortley Village on 100 acres of fields.

"We're committed. We think it will capture the imagination of homebuyers," says Sergautis about the planned development at the northwest corner of Sunningdale Road and Adelaide Street.

"We don't want to do the same old, same old, over and over again."

Developer Bernie Zaifman

Always a fan of Wortley Village and an avid supporter of new urbanism, Sergautis decided to try a different style of development on his property.

"I look at what the other builders are doing. It seems to me they are doing the same thing they have been doing for the last 30, 40 years: building two- or three-car garages with houses behind."

"I want to pick up the things that have been lost in the new subdivisions and duplicate what made Wortley Village one of the more attractive areas to live in."

Key elements would include interesting architecture from several builders, shopping within walking distance, parkettes and rear lanes in some areas.

Essential to the community would be a focus. Sergautis says it "could be a bakery/cafe, or several buildings that cater to the community."

"Instead of sterile parks, we want to create neighbourhood parkettes scattered about."

The area's large environmental area, at present a woodlot, would not have houses backing onto it,

but a road that showcases it to everyone, he says.

"That way, the whole community benefits," adds associate Howard Crummer.

A large shopping area off Sunningdale would have front and rear access, so residents of the community would have the same access as drivers heading along Sunningdale.

There would be 1,000 units, with 500 to 600 family units and the rest townhouses and low-rise apartment units.

Modern suburbs lose out because they appeal to only one economic or social class of resident, Sergautis says.

"Right now, developers are trying to isolate, sterilize with one type of housing.

The street pattern in the community would be a true grid, but shorter streets would ease suburbanites' concerns about cars racing through the neighbourhood, Crummer says.

Houses would be closer to the street and rear lanes with detached garages would go behind some of the units.

Sergautis and Crummer dismiss concerns buyers will shy away from rear lanes and detached garages.

It's true builders worry about paying for more roadway and the question of who maintains the lanes — the city or the homeowners — has to be settled. But builders can actually put in more houses per acre with rear lanes, Sergautis says.

Homeowners get more of a house because less space is taken up by the garage.

There has always been a stable market in Old North and Old South for attractive homes with detached garages and people have always paid a premium price for homes there, Sergautis says.

Those older houses are often costly to renovate or maintain and are hampered by small kitchens and low basements.

So why not buy a new house that looks the same? Sergautis asks.

There are still a lot of wrinkles to work out, but, Sergautis says, he's committed to placemaking.

"This is going to happen."