

CONDO LIVING

TRENDS



The Gore Park promenade is bringing new life to Hamilton's core.

Hamilton is on the go

Fabled steel town is seeing unprecedented rate of condo construction

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Special to QMI Agency

Hamilton has long been known as the steel capital of Canada, a monolithic industrialized city at the west end of Lake Ontario. Listed as the ninth-largest metropolitan area in Canada, this Mecca of industrial manufacturing is experiencing an urban revitalization at its downtown core.

With a growing arts and culture sector and robust technology infrastructure, the city has moved away from primary steel manufacturing. According to the Conference Board of Canada, Hamilton has the most diversified economy in Canada.

Hamilton's downtown is seeing a rapid development in the condo sector with the telltale signs of construction

cranes across the cityscape. There hasn't really been a lot of condo development previously in the downtown, says Glen Norton, manager of the economic development department of the city of Hamilton. While not exactly a condo boom says Norton, "I would say we're seeing unprecedented growth in the building of condos downtown."

With two new hotels in the past year and a wide variety of restaurants and entertainment venues, the downtown has developed an eclectic urban atmosphere. "We now have ready to open on June 1st, a 55,000 sq. ft. supermarket in the downtown mall called Nation's Fresh Foods," says Norton. "We haven't had a downtown supermarket in a long time. We've got probably 10 new restaurants opening this year." Ted Valeri, head of Valery homes, is one of the developers behind the mag-

nificent restoration of the historic Royal Connaught hotel. "Hamilton's going through a transformation and the downtown has hit its low. I think right now it's poised to come back. In so doing, the key factor in the revitalization of the downtown is this crown jewel called the Royal Connaught which we're a part of."

The residences of Royal Connaught, their proposed 700-unit condominium development is expected to include 135 units constructed behind the original façade of the two existing landmark Connaught buildings.

Born and raised a true Hamiltonian, Valeri envisions the exodus of residents from the suburbs back to a newly revitalized downtown. "Because up until now, there really was no incentive for anyone to live here in the core," he says.

Toronto commuters will find that the 45-minutes by GO transit is quite doable,

and Metrolinx is planning to open a new GO rail station in time for the 2015 Pan American games, providing all day, two-way service. But Norton points out that Hamilton is not just a bedroom community anymore.

"You can live in Hamilton and work in Hamilton, you don't even need a car. You could have an office downtown and buy a house downtown for the price of a house in Toronto. So we think we've got a pretty good value proposition here and the migration that we're seeing from several areas is proving that out."

For example, 29 year-old developer Steve Kulakowsky is building the Witton Lofts in downtown Hamilton. "It's downtown in the north end of the city which is close to the waterfront where traditionally there hasn't been any development," he says. The new condominium project is a



On James Street in Hamilton where an "art crawl" happens on the first Friday of every month.

conversion of an 80-year-old, three-story school building with a three-story glass addition on top of it.

Kulakowsky says that people are wanting to be downtown again. "More amenities, restaurants and attractions are coming downtown at the same time. It's just the perfect time to be wanting to come back to the city and I think the

demographics of young professionals and empty-nesters are the people that want these condo units."

Torontonians, weary of the maddening traffic congestion and high cost of housing, are eyeing Hamilton as a viable live-work-play destination. One in four current home purchasers in Hamilton are from Toronto.