

Creativity around the house (or home)

by BROCK WEIR

Spring is a time of renewal when it comes to our natural world, but most of us can agree that, as a result, it's also a time for renewal of our collective spirits.

As our days get longer, flowers begin their upward sprout, the grass gets greener, and the choir of birds that call our community home prepare for a big, extended musical number that lasts until the late fall, we're all imbued with a bit more energy than we had in the dark days of winter ? and I say this as an unapologetic winter enthusiast!

Even though we're not gaining any further minutes as we get ever-closer to the summer, the extended daylight makes it feel like so much more is possible over the course of 24-hours. We budget them differently, make better use out of them, and want to maximize them because, when the workday wraps, the time between getting home and doing it all over again in the morning is to be savoured rather than weathered. That doesn't always feel the case when the snow is blowing.

Speaking only for myself, although I suspect most of you might find yourself in this same boat, I feel my creativity hit an upward trajectory around this time of year as well.

Words on the page come just a little bit easier, a boon for someone in this job.

Nature's near-blooming bounty offers a near-limitless backdrop for photos and other forms of visual art. The sunlight and the eagerness to get outside and make the most of it also re-charges off-the-clock hobbies as well.

As a voracious but leisurely-paced reader, colder months tend to push this love to the backburner in favour of some degree of hibernation and ?comfort? shows and movies at night. Yet, there are few things better at this time of year than grabbing the reading material of choice at the end of the workday and going straight out again to your backyard, porch or nearest greenspace to both enjoy the golden hour light and make a dent in your library.

That, in turn, must go a long way in goosing up that mental creativity.

Although I am not a homeowner at present, one can see this springtime creativity in abundance as our communities host home and lifestyle shows, exhibitions that highlight scores of business and service providers close to home that can help make your living space the best it can be.

Visiting these shows, I always marvel at the ideas people have to improve and reimagine their spaces, indoors and/or outdoors, at various price points, of course ? whether their properties echo our once-sprawling parcels of farmland or offer little more than a balcony or postage stamp-sized patio.

These shows open your eyes to what feels like a limitless number of possibilities and ways to make it happen.

A decade or two ago, who could have envisioned that the humble shipping container could not only be transformed into beautiful, functional homes, large and small, but also into prime exemplars of what's possible? Well, creative builders who have breathed new life into smaller-scale decommissioned Victorian churches into comfortable single-family homes, and factories and schools into modern lofts with a nod to the past, probably had an idea or two ? but, with the housing crisis continuing unabated, others seem to be taking to this idea with renewed vigor.

After all, many of us these days have no alternative than to look at, well, alternatives to the traditional housing model.

As much as government supports and, most importantly, action, are key to easing this crisis, if not solving it outright, creativity has to be on the table here as well.

I think we can all agree that the current housing model in this country needs a fair bit of help, so a healthy dose of thinking 'outside the box' will be essential in re-thinking that aforementioned art of the possible.

Municipalities within the GTHA have a finite amount of space in which to live, move and develop. Many of our communities are running out of greenfield lands for new developments, so infill is and will be very much the name of the game.

Residents in well-established neighbourhoods across the area are rightly focused on maintaining the character of their existing neighbourhoods in the face of infill, but this needs a bit of a re-think as I fear this specific focus will not be sustainable in the long run.

Municipalities need to recognize that when parcels of land that could be subject to infill come on the market, they have to exercise some creative muscle in maximizing that space and opportunity - and that includes the approval of fourplexes. Making sure such builds maintain the look and feel of the neighbourhood in question will be a challenge at the municipal level, but they have the resources - human or otherwise - to rise to the challenge.

Yet, Premier Ford has nixed the very idea of fourplexes.

Speaking to reporters last month, he said: 'I can assure you 1,000 per cent, you go into the middle of communities and start putting up four-storey, six-storey, eight-storey buildings right deep into the communities there is going to be a lot of shouting and screaming. That is a massive mistake. We're not going to go into communities and start building four-storey or six-storey buildings beside residences like this. It is off the table for us. We're going to build homes, single-dwelling homes, townhomes - that's what we're going to focus on.'

Yet, at the same time, his government, according to Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Paul Calandra, said what is very much on the table is potentially considering temporary lodgings, such as student housing, and rooms and suites in retirement settings as units towards Ontario's housing goals.

'We will continue to explore data sources for tracking the numbers of other institutional types of housing such as student residences and retirement types of housing such as student residences and retirement homes for future program years and commit to engaging municipalities on the same,' said Calandra in a letter to the City of Mississauga, per a report from CP24.

Counting some of these types of housing units towards the overall goal prescribed to municipalities by the Province of Ontario is just a little too creative for my taste.

There is no debating that for seniors living in these residences it's very much a home. But, by and large, these are congregate living settings that do not dovetail with the Premier's commitment to the housing types above - no matter how creative you get - at the expense of fourplexes which, with a little creativity, need not get anywhere close to four-, six-, or eight-storeys. Or stick out like sore thumbs, as some put it.

No matter the type, size, or configuration of your own home or living situation, I hope the spring and everything it has to offer inspires creativity - we're certainly going to need it!