

# Revitalizing older neighbourhoods

BY DAVID HUTTON, THE STARPHOENIX FEBRUARY 10, 2011

For architect Harold Madi the difficulty with new developments in older neighbourhoods is that one ugly building can dial up tensions and turn residents against the entire concept.

"Once you build an ugly building it takes a long time to take it down," Madi said Wednesday from Toronto.

A prominent Canadian urban planner and partner with a Toronto urban planning and design firm, Madi will give this year's Great Places lecture tonight at the Mendel Art Gallery on revitalizing older neighbourhoods.

Madi oversaw the "Broadway 360" report that lays out a vision for Saskatoon's Broadway Avenue corridor and is leading the design of a facelift to the area in front of Union Station in Toronto, considered the 'front door' to Canada's largest city, that includes a "European-style" plaza.

The talk will explore infill development, which Saskatoon planners have targeted as critical to rein in outward expansion.

The challenge of breathing life into older neighbourhoods through infill is fitting new development in with the context and character of what's there already, Madi said.

Many of the guidelines for infill are routinely ignored and zoning bylaws often don't do enough to protect existing residents when a developer builds a small-scale infill home or a larger building that doesn't fit in, he said.

"It's tough because design is often subjective and not easily measureable," he said. "But at the same time you have to set out the clear objectives because character is very important and every neighbourhood's character is different."

Adelaide-Churchill residents had a bitter fight last year over a seniors housing complex being constructed on the property of a former school. On Broadway Avenue, the upscale Luxe condos drew area scorn for being out-of-character with the rest of the street.

Madi holds the Luxe condos up as an example of "how infill ought to happen on main streets."

There are sure to be more with a soon-to-be-unveiled city incentive program targeting the many vacant lots that dot the city's core areas.

"On the horizon we might see a lot of tensions in neighbourhoods if one or two developments are just

so bad they get everyone's back up," Madi said.

"Everyone begins to associate infill with bad design. Good planning can preempt any rise in tensions to make sure you get buy in and support.

"People need to believe this is good for their neighbourhood."

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